

Fantasy & Science Fiction

FEBRUARY 1951



John the Revelator
 The One Who Waits
 One of the Family
 The Railway Carriage
 My Brother's Wife
 The Episode of the Perilous Talisman
 The Friendly Demon
 plus stories by MARTIN GARDNER, LAWRENCE GOLDMAN and others

OLIVER LA FARGE
 RAY BRADBURY
 R. BRETNOR
 F. TENNYSON JESSE
 WILSON TUCKER
 JEREMIAH PHELAN
 DANIEL DEFOE



A selection of the best stories of fantasy and science fiction, new and old

Fantasy and Science Fiction

VOLUME 2, No. 1

FEBRUARY, 1951

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Oliver La Farge, one of America's most distinguished anthropologists and novelists, has long been noted for his interest in, and his knowledge of, the American Indians. His novel of Navajo life, LAUGHING BOY, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1930 and is today considered an American classic. Now Mr. La Farge turns from the hogans and herds of the Navajo to explore the awesome field of cybernetics. With his usual keen perception of humanity's strengths and weaknesses and expressing his profound, almost mystical grasp of the problem at hand in a tersely sharp prose, Mr. La Farge demonstrates that, in the final analysis, even the most wondrous computer is helpless before its creator, man.

John the Revelator

by OLIVER LA FARGE

IN the endless, see-saw race between Russia and the Western World for military superiority, the relative advancement of their computing machines became the test of who was in the lead. Constant improvement of instruments of destruction and of the means of delivering them at enormous speeds, altitudes, and distances demanded calculations farther and farther beyond human capacity. Without ever better computers, progress would stop. Each country's achievements in this line became matters of public interest.

In the U. S., the Navy computer, Mark III, which was unveiled at Harvard in 1950, drew fair public attention. Two years later it was eclipsed by the Air Force's Mark IV. By the time Mark V was set up at Chicago, the public began to be fascinated and somewhat horrified by descriptions of the "mechanical brains."

The Russians built and maintained their machines in greater secrecy within their huge, enclosed research center behind the Urals. The information about them that was given out to the people contained at first, as did the American press stories, a half humorous element of human interest.

Shortly before the U. S. came up with Luke this trend ceased abruptly, following an article in *Red Star* rebuking journalists and certain scientists for bourgeois sentimental anthropomorphism in regard to computing machines.

Luke began as Mark VI, but a week before it went into operation a junior officer remarked that Marks were getting monotonous, it was time we had another evangelist. A reporter took up the idea, the public liked it, Public Relations approved it, and the machine became Luke.

Luke seemed at once human and superhuman. Stories about it developed a standard pattern in which, half jokingly, half seriously, with awe which was real and yet kidded itself, the machine was written up as if it lived. At the end the public would always be reminded that after all it was only a machine and could not function unless a human being turned on the switches.

Back in the forties, the I. B. M. machine in New York had been the first to show signs of "temperament." Luke and the later Marks, enormously more complex, had various troubles which suggested frailties of the human mind and temper. Their operators spoke of resting them after fatiguing calculations, it was said that Mark V became jittery if it was rushed, and that Luke sometimes grew short-tempered and rejected problems.

Technicians were then working on a machine, inevitably called John, which would, it was believed, be the ultimate product in its line. No one could think of any capability that could be added. This project was backed, not by one service, but by the Department of Defense. It was in anticipation of John's completion that the Secretary issued Department of Defense Circular eighty-nine dash twelve, "Anthropomorphic References to Computers." The circular directed that such machines should be referred to only by the neuter pronoun, and forbade a number of expressions which implied that they were human. Persons under the control of the Department who used such expressions would be warned, and if they persisted would receive formal reprimands which would be recorded in their permanent 201 files (Army and Air Force), jackets (Navy), or civil service records.

Not long after eighty-nine dash twelve (classified "Restricted") came out, *Pravda* ran a scorching article on retrogressive deviationist superstitions about computing machines and other products of Marxist scientific genius. Central Intelligence got word that two young mathematicians had been sent to Siberia for speaking of the machine Russia was then building as "Ivan."

John was built and established at U. C. L. A. John had everything. Problems had to be fed to all computers with their Greek and Latin letters and other symbols reduced to a numerical code, which in turn had to be reduced from the decimal to the binary system. The double process often took the mathematicians-in-waiting much longer than it took the machines to solve the problem once they had it. John did all this for itself. You could hand the machine a problem set up in figures and symbols. It scanned this with an electronic eye, encoded it in numbers, reduced these to the binary system, and handed out the result for checking, if desired. From the binary sheet it punched its own tape, proceeded to the solution, decoded that and typed it in final form.

John's retention cylinders (eighty-nine dash twelve forbade the use of the term "memory") had tremendous capacity. Within limits, too, the machine could be guided by voice, interpreting limited spoken instructions in a manner believed to be analogous to the response of the neurons and synapses of the human brain to sounds channelled through the auditory system. It worked at record speed, and no one knew what limits there were to the intricacies of the problems it could solve.

Central Intelligence reported that the new Russian machine was in operation, and bade fair to be a rival to John. It seemed that even the Politburo was speaking of it informally as "Ivan." John's advance publicity aroused a certain horror in the general public. An ill-advised P. R. O. put out a story about the similarity of John's processes from "reading" to calculations on a yes-and-no binary basis, to interpretation or "writing," to the supposed processes of human perceptions, thought, and conclusions. The public added this idea to the knowledge that John's capacities far exceeded man's, and began to be seriously alarmed. To allay these fears, stories went out stressing the fact that John was only a machine. It could do nothing without man. "A mechanical brain is not enough," the most effective release ended. "There must be the thing no machine can possess, the human spirit, the divine spark."

A fantastic-science writer assigned to cover John for UP learned that in test runs it had been found that the machine did best if, when not in use, a weak current continued to run through it. The writer drew an analogy with sleep, and went on to a disturbing fantasy about what John might dream. The Department of Defense tried to ban this writer from further

access to the machine. This set off one of those rows, so pleasing to the public, in which the high command is caught way off base. The end result was a relaxing of the general feeling about the greatest of all computers.

John was formally christened, like a ship. A chaplain said a prayer. Public Relations arranged that the first person to present a problem to it should be the Rev. Andrew Lethbridge, a pious and much-loved little man famous for his work among delinquent children. Initial use of John in his service was bound to make a good impression upon a nation growing more and more nervous over every aspect of the race in scientific methods of destruction.

Rev. Andrew Lethbridge described himself as an applied sociologist. His problem was in statistics of delinquency, involving deviation from the mean and probable error. Such calculations are ordinarily made by simple quadratics; the capacities of the new machine, however, allowed him to introduce a range of factors, such as number of years of parental schooling and amount spent on clothing in relation to mean annual temperatures, which put his problem quite beyond the scope of human figuring.

As arranged by Public Relations, the little man was presented to John at four-thirty, immediately after the unveiling ceremonies. Commodore Sandeman, who had been military supervisor of its construction, did the honors. He demonstrated John's various capabilities, with Mr. Lethbridge beside him and the cameras making a soothing record of the minister's benignant profile beside the machine. The commodore was especially proud of the voice-control attachment. To show how this operated, he had the first proposition typed for presentation with an error in it. This was fed to John, who encoded it, started work, then stopped abruptly. A red light went on like an angry eye. The commodore stepped to the speaking tube and turned on the switch.

"Correction," he said slowly. "Fourth character, second line, now capital sigma. Correct to capital sigma sub one. Recode."

John spewed out the original sheet, the red light went off, the machinery started again.

The commodore consulted his watch. He introduced Mr. Lethbridge to Lieutenant Weems of the Navy and Captain Massey of the Army, and left him in their charge. The minister fed in the rest of his material. Shortly the answer came out. He sat down at a desk for a preliminary look at it. Weems

put the main switch on "rest current," a position to which he and Massey referred, in private, as "sleep." It was after five. The two officers had had a long day. There were four guards in the big room, and Mr. Lethbridge was beyond suspicion. The officers excused themselves and sloped off.

Mr. Lethbridge laid the solution down with a sigh. Whatever the machine might be used for later, the determinations it had just made would give him and his fellows entirely new competence in their fight against wretchedness. He went over to the computer and studied it, standing beside the speaking tube and the shelf on which John handed out its answers. A few dim lights showed inside the cavern full of bright wires. There was a barely audible, humming sound. He could see the nearer retention cylinders turning over very slowly. He thought, he *is* asleep; I wonder if he does dream. Quite naturally, not at all concerned that the guards were watching, he knelt and prayed.

He spoke his improvised prayer in a soft, thoughtful voice. He prayed for the intentions of the men who would use John, and spoke of the wonder of God's works as shown in this creation of His creatures. He prayed that John might be used only for good, that directly or indirectly, God Himself might guide him. He said that so wonderful a machine should serve to bring man closer to his Maker. At the end he was thinking aloud more than praying:

"Can you give us the ultimate answer? Can you write the equation for God? What is the symbol to represent Him? Can you solve man's real problem, so that all these other problems will be forgotten?"

He rose, dusted his knees, and picked up his answer sheet. The guards let him out. When he was gone, one of them said, "That's one for the book. He was praying to it."

"For it, more likely," another said. "Might be a good idea."

The regular attendants, military and civilian, reported at eight-thirty the next morning, followed in a few minutes by Commodore Sandeman with the senior physicist from Los Alamos, bringing the first military problem. These two found the others in a cluster around the answer shelf with two of the guards, examining a piece of paper.

An Air Force captain saluted. "Look at this, sir. He did this in — I mean, it did this while on 'rest current.'"

The commodore took the paper. On it was a strange formula, in which

there were three blanks where symbols were clearly required. No one present could make head or tail of it. The senior physicist said that it made him uncomfortable, but he did not know why.

The guards passed on their predecessors' report of Mr. Lethbridge's prayer. No one had approached John after he left. It was noted that the voice control switch had been left on, there was the possibility that Lethbridge had fed in a formula by voice. This was most unlikely; there should have been a corresponding punched tape and binary sheet, but there were not. Investigation showed that Lethbridge, barely able to handle the mathematics of the Gaussian Curve, could never have provided propositions of the complexity indicated by the form of the equation.

The mysterious solution was submitted to various people, all of whom were baffled, until it was handed to Rev. Anthony Price, S.J. He may have read it; no one will ever know. Father Price was a theologian, a philosopher, and one of the top four pure mathematicians in the world.

Father Price started work on the equation on a Thursday morning. By Thursday noon he was dead. The sheet of paper was propped up against some books before him. He was slumped in his chair, his head thrown back, and on his face was an expression of absolute bliss. Brother Benildus, his amanuensis, reported that the priest had taken up the problem at ten-fifteen, following breakfast after nine o'clock mass. He had brought in the mail at eleven. Father Price had raised his hand in a signal not to disturb him. At that point he had written nothing on his scratch pad. The brother came in again at twelve to remind him to come to lunch, and found him dead.

On his yellow pad the Jesuit had written six Hebrew characters. Three of these, in his usual, neat script, were arranged in a triangle, vaguely in the pattern of the blank spaces in the equation. They were *aleph*, *lamed*, and *tau*. Then in a sprawl he had written the word "JAH." That was all.

Before this a rumor had leaked out that John had "talked in his sleep." The Jesuit's death broke further through security. It could not be concealed that the death occurred while he was working on something extremely difficult produced by John. In an interview, Brother Benildus insisted that the Father had not died, properly speaking. He had simply left his clay behind him. "He looked as if he had seen the face of God."

The equation and work-sheet were taken by a high-ranking courier to a mathematical colleague of Father Price's in Canada. The Canadian studied

them for a few minutes, then handed them back to the courier, saying that he thought it would be unwise to read them. He recommended that the sheets be locked away somewhere safe. They were later deposited in Fort Knox.

Ten days after Father Price's death John turned out another document at night. This was a solid mass of Greek capital letters, plainly non-mathematical. A scientist with classical training who was present picked it up. He started, then in a strained voice he began to read aloud in Greek. Commodore Sandeman, who had been summoned, said, "What the hell does that mean?"

"Eh? Oh — 'In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.' And it goes on to, 'And the light shineth in the darkness; and the darkness comprehendeth it not.' That's repeated four times."

The incident was classified "Top Secret." It precipitated a searching, futile investigation. The feelings of the high command were not eased when, that same day, Luke added a contribution of his own to a problem looking to a vastly improved guided missile. At the end of his solutions he printed numbers which when decoded made another Greek sentence followed by four figures. Translated, the passage read, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do. 23:34." The numbers referred to the chapter and verse in St. Luke. News of this was also suppressed, but outsiders became aware of an uneasiness among the personnel dealing with both machines. Rumors ran through the country. Investigators noted that the rumors were sometimes charged with terror, but equally often with great hope.

Great Britain advised the appropriate American authorities of strange behavior on the part of its own latest computer. Curious items of intelligence seeped out of the reservation behind the Urals. Four more scientists had been sent to Siberia, and it was said that a couple had been shot. The commissar who had been in charge of the construction of Ivan looked to be in line for purging. Among the people of Russia, too, strange tales were circulating.

As has been noted, Luke was short-tempered and sometimes rejected problems. One was submitted to him, to determine the height at which the latest refinement of the H-bomb should be exploded for maximum anti-personnel effect. Luke threw this out, and promptly printed a simple

mathematical formula: " $600 + (3 \times 20) + 6$." He continued repeating these figures in answer to everything offered him until, in the early afternoon, they threw the switch and left him to cool off. Even among his attendants there were several with enough acquaintance with the Bible to recognize that the figures came from Revelations.

The public still knew nothing of what was going on, although talk was kept alive by odd actions of the old I. B. M. machine, to which anyone could have access. Luke went back to normal work. John, it was noted, solved whatever problems were offered to him, although sometimes he seemed to do so reluctantly. Captain Massey remarked that John had a much sweeter nature than Luke. (Eighty-nine dash twelve was by now virtually a dead letter.)

One day some very distinguished foreigners were invited to see John handle a non-military problem. There was no reason to believe that anything out of line would occur. The problem dealt with the permutations of the 1,400 heritable characteristics of the human body and was expected to shed new light on the vexed question of defining a race. The visitors were attended by a Senator, State Department representatives, and the press.

John encoded the problem and set to work, humming and clicking cheerfully. The first page of answers was dropped on the receiving shelf. The geneticists and anthropologists concerned in the matter picked it up and sat down to study it with their mathematical assistants. The second page came out. The opening line completed an equation from page one, then, to the dismay of the officials in charge, once again came a solid Greek text. To make the matter worse, two of the distinguished foreigners were able to read it with ease, even in the archaic, first-century form in which it was typed.

The text began in the thirteenth chapter of Revelations, jumped to the glorious opening of the twenty-first, then continued with entirely new matter, a passionate exhortation to mid-twentieth century mankind, written with all the same literary quality. John turned out altogether three sheets of this text before he returned to the problem and settled down to a long tabulation of the possible combinations of 1,400 heritable characteristics with forty-seven and forty-eight chromosomes.

This incident could not be covered up. The papers had it, and they

played it for all it was worth. Nor was there any way after that to keep the press from keeping a watch upon John, Luke, and the later Marks. The papers added Greek scholars to their staffs. The Department of Defense also retained Greek scholars, to sit in with the mathematicians when solutions were being received and segregate from properly classifiable material the sermons — or revelations — offered by the machines.

Once John had broken through the wall of secrecy, it was his practice to produce his texts at the beginning of the day, when he was first awakened by switching on full current. Luke appended his to solutions. Marks IV and V proved to be worth no more than routine coverage by the wire services; the texts that they produced were few and generally garbled. One could only say that they were trying.

The Epistles of John and Luke, as they came to be called, and those of the British machine, known to its users simply as Comp, were circulated throughout the accessible world. It also became clearer and clearer that Ivan was acting up.

Various Soviet periodicals and the official radio ran diatribes about neo-primitivistic, sentimentalist-superstitious deviations concerning computers. An unusual number of arrests were made among the ordinary people. Scientists, generals, and officials of the Politburo were holding closed meetings. There were signs that the people were getting out of hand. The Patriarch and several bishops were put under house arrest, and then turned loose, apparently because of popular indignation. It looked as if the Soviet system might be cracking.

The major churches of the Western World agreed that it would be superstition to believe that the Epistles were revealed. Whatever their source, they followed the lines of true doctrine, should be read by the faithful, and could be used in sermons. Certain lesser churches and many laymen were less skeptical. Daily, crowds gathered before the buildings at New Haven and Los Angeles where the machines were housed, praying and waiting. The Russian government was unable to conceal the fact that pilgrimages were being made to the gates of the closed reservation, and that by one means or another, Ivan's utterances were being transmitted to the pilgrims outside.

Among those who waited every morning outside John's building was the congregation of the New African Baptist Church, a group known for its

singing. It was their regular practice while waiting to see if there would be an Epistle that day, to sing the little-known spiritual:

"What is John a-doing,
John the Revelator?
Writing Revelations
And the Book of the Seven Seas."

By the third day all present were singing with them, and the song spread. Its simple words and impressive tune touched directly upon the feelings of America.

The ferment among the peoples of the divided world had its influence on their leaders. Both the West and East made concessions in the U. N. Assembly. A new reasonableness appeared. A treaty with Austria was signed, some of the barriers between East and West Germany were removed, a formula was developing for settling the Korean War. The Atomic Energy Control Committee, which had stayed recessed for four years out of sheer hopelessness, came together again.

The men who were working on the dreadful new weapons were also affected. Lesser machines had developed a nasty way of refusing to solve certain key problems. John, in his great meekness, would solve them, but in doing so he made their authors agonizingly ashamed. The fact was that for some months no one had been able to bring himself to feed into that machine anything which looked to a really deadly form of progress.

John had been in operation a year. His maintenance crew ran off a routine reading of his memory cylinders, to check on just what he had stored. The reading was made by John himself, who transposed the impulses on the cylinders to tapes, ran these off in binary numbers, and then decoded. Most of what came out was what would be expected from what had gone in, although there were several formulae that could not be interpreted or accounted for. From one cylinder, however, John produced a series of numbers of one and two digits in no intelligible sequence.

Experimentation showed that these were a code for the Russian alphabet, which, like the Hebrew, was not on John's typewriter. He had recorded what read like one side of a series of telephone conversations, biblical in tone, charged with love, and certainly emanating from Ivan, or whatever — or whoever — controlled Ivan. The outstanding quality was a saintly gentle-

ness, yet through that gentleness were expressed searing opinions of what human leaders throughout the world were trying to do. The conversations were also loaded with information about the problems the Russians were working on.

The high command seized upon this information, then with a shock faced the certainty that the other half of these exchanges, equally unreserved, was available in Ivan's memory. This realization completely ruined what had begun as a day of triumph.

Shortly thereafter in Washington was held a most secret meeting of the key leaders of the United States and the British Empire. No secretaries or advisers were present, no notes were taken. Events since John started operating were reviewed, then there was a presentation of the international situation. Russia had been so shaken and had become so reasonable that, if only the Western Powers could end the dead heat in which they had remained with their opponents for the last years, if only they could pull a little ahead, it should be possible to reach solutions of all the major conflicts. Even control and inspection of atomic energy could be assured. Given certain assumptions, which were undoubtedly correct, the means of obtaining that advantage existed.

The toughest military man, the coldest scientist present shrank from that means, but the end was peace and security for a free world. Discussion was long and earnest. At length the President himself summarized that only for the end stated could the action be justified, that it was for this that the machines themselves were striving, and that if they could ensure victory, then it was their duty before God to ensure it. The council voted unanimously to act.

A selected sub-committee proceeded to confer with two famous brain surgeons who had been minutely investigated. These, Commodore Sandeman, and two of the chief technicians who had constructed John, then disappeared for a period of four weeks.

At the end of that time, at ten o'clock one night, the commodore, accompanied by a number of senior officers of the three services, dismissed the guards from John's building. The officers, armed, stood guard. The surgeons and technicians joined Sandeman in John's room, escorted by some high generals, admirals, and scientists.

With a shaking hand Sandeman turned the main switch from "rest" to

"off." The faint lights went out, the humming stopped. The technicians laid out instruments, the surgeons rolled up their sleeves and scrubbed.

"You realize, gentlemen," the commodore said, "that after this — this lobotomy, John will run twenty-five percent slower. And some day we may reach problems," there was pleading in his voice, "that he won't be able to solve."

A general laid a hand on his shoulder. "We realize, commodore. We know how you feel. Believe me, nobody is happy about this."

The older surgeon said, "May we have the operating lights, please?"

The lights were turned on, the doctors and technicians entered the machine. One technician was weeping, one was swearing softly.

Sandeman went to a corner and sat down at a desk, burying his face in his hands.

The next morning Luke blew a fuse. For several days it blew one whenever it was turned on. Thereafter it functioned as a good machine. John solved problems efficiently, it encoded and decoded, but all its operations were a little slower. Central Intelligence picked up a circumstantial account of how several more scientists, being taken to Siberia from the Soviet enclosure, had cried out as they passed through the main gate, "They have killed Ivan! They have cut us off from God!"

The story was unreasonable, because there was good evidence that Ivan was running smoothly.

A brooding sorrow and fear crept through the world. From the computers came only the computations demanded of them. The mathematics of weapons construction progressed rapidly. The Atomic Energy Control Committee recessed indefinitely out of sheer hopelessness. The interchange between East and West Germany was cut off. In short order the world was working its way once again to the war that would really be final.



Join **MARCH OF DIMES**

JANUARY 15-31

Mr. Bretnor is remembered (as if anyone could forget!) as the creator of that martial titan, Papa Schimmelhorn. But herewith Mr. Bretnor proves himself a deviationist from the Schimmelhorn line. This is no lighthearted tale of gnurrs dancing to Papa's piping, but rather a cold, eerie, bewildering story of an old maid and a mirror, a stolen grave and a stranger "turned inside out." However, the Bretnor touch is as sure, and as deft, with supernatural tragedy as it is with scientific comedy.

One of the Family

by R. BRETNOR

SOMETIMES when she was alone, when the dying light could scarcely push its way through the cobwebbed Toby jugs and hobnail glass and pseudo-Dresden figurines in her shop window, when the slow, sour squeaking of her rocker lulled her attention away from Bulwer Lytton — sometimes, then, Miss Graes let her attention stray to the frightening mirror, and linger there.

The mirror was tall and heavy. Its bevelled glass sat sullenly in its squared, black oak frame. Afterwards, Miss Graes always knew that, reflecting nothing, it seized the things it saw, and held them, cold and dead and perfect, within itself. Afterwards, tense and trembling on the chair's edge, she always knew that there had been an instant, great with peril, when it had extruded its dark depths searchingly into the darkening room, an instant during which shadows had groped in three dimensions from its frame.

The mirror hung beyond the stairs, high on the wall above the spinet-desk, where it could not see Miss Graes, where she did not need to pass it to reach the echoing, empty rooms in which she lived. For a while, long after her father's death, she had locked it away, face downward and closely hooded in many layers of brown paper, as though the woman who had cheated her might use it as an entrance-way. And might she not? — Miss Graes had asked herself — might guilt not rouse her in her stolen grave, send her across the gap of time and death, vengefully?

Sometimes, on a Saturday afternoon, Miss Graes would tell Mrs. Ambejian about it all, letting her visitor's long ivory knitting needles click commas for her dusty, frayed-out voice.

" . . . *he* used to watch it by the hour, the firelight on the walls shining back from it, the firelight and the coals . . . that's why I knew that it was wrong to let it lie there in the dark like that because of *her* . . . and when I had to open up the shop, because the money went — I've told you about that — I hung it up . . . "

Click-click. "Yes, dear." *Click-click.*

" . . . she was dead, and buried too, before ever I was born, and I have tried to think of her with Christian charity, poor soul . . . but it's a hard thing to do, Mrs. Ambejian, with her lying there in my rightful place . . . and hating me because she's stolen it . . . and watching from behind the mirror there to do me harm . . . "

"Yes, dear." *Click-click-click.*

" . . . at first I didn't know just what it was that troubled me about that mirror . . . not until Cousin Ethel died in the accident, and they buried her in the one place remaining, and I learned there was no room left . . . oh, then I knew . . . "

Click-click. *Click-click.*

" . . . after *he* died — that was when Dr. Flitter wanted to marry me, but I said no — I saw my duty as a daughter, Mrs. Ambejian . . . and all my life I waited for the day when I would be at rest, beside *him*, to lie there in his strength until the end . . . "

Then Mrs. Ambejian would shake her massive head, sighing through moist, plum-colored lips, and she would think of her own sister's boy, who had been put away because he saw the clutching hands that grew out from the walls.

" . . . oh, *he* was strong — men are not strong like that today — and great and good . . . what other man would take a beggar in, penniless, mad, without a name, feed her and clothe her till her dying day, then give her decent burial with his kin? . . . none, none . . . he used to tell us how he found her, standing right outside there in the rain, wet to the skin . . . and smiling, smiling, smiling . . . 'I'm turned inside out!' she said, when he asked who she was. 'I'm turned inside out!' . . . and he always laughed about it, and called her 'poor crazy Annie,' and said that she was

like one of the family . . . *he* didn't know that she was waiting, waiting, to — to —"

Here Miss Graes always faltered; and Mrs. Ambejian, dropping the narrow needles, exclaimed, "Perhaps — perhaps she was a witch?" and crossed herself. Then, usually, she remembered her sister's boy again, and picked the needles up, while Miss Graes darted a quick, frightened glance over her shoulder at the awful mirror.

". . . I — I feel her coming closer," Miss Graes would say, letting her fingertips rustle across the parchment of her cheek, ". . . I am not long for this world, I know, and I must lie in a strange grave, because of her . . ."

Click-click. "But you could — have her moved?" *Click-click.*

". . . no, Mrs. Ambejian, I can't turn her out . . . it would be sinful . . . let the dead lie . . ." Blindly, with a thin vein of hatred pulsing in her brain, Miss Graes would turn the pages of *Rienzi*, lying open on her knees. *Yes, yes, uproot her* — her grinning skull, her sheaf of alien bones, her trespassing decay. Miss Graes had planned it once, there in that room — and, as she planned it, had felt the threat of darkness; had felt the mirror stirring on the wall. ". . . let the dead lie, I always say . . ."

On the last day but one, a Saturday, Mrs. Ambejian came, took her accustomed place, and set her needles clicking quietly. She waited for the rocker to stop squeaking. She waited for Miss Graes to speak. The shredded sunlight, drained of all its warmth, stabbed down to send the dust-motes in their dance, around her needles, around her plump, dark hands, over the worn fur collar-piece of her enormous coat.

Presently, Mrs. Ambejian peered at Miss Graes, first with a heavy-lidded curiosity, then with wide-eyed concern. Miss Graes was rocking slowly, painfully, her right hand hanging limp, her left hand twitching on the open book. She stared intently at a point in space, a point that oscillated with the chair. She did not seem to breathe.

"You tell me, dear?" Mrs. Ambejian's voice was too large for the room. "You — you are ill?"

Miss Graes made no reply.

Mrs. Ambejian dropped the entwined needles in her lap. "You are sick, yes?" She started to her feet. "I will send Dr. Scoria, the same as for myself. I will take care of you."

The rocking stopped. The sour sound died. Miss Graes turned her bloodless face away.

"Where are you sick?"

". . . I am not sick, Mrs. Ambejian . . . I am afraid . . ."

The broken sunlight swirled as the big woman sat back into her chair.

". . . I felt *her* there today . . . and stronger now . . . I had to run . . . what can she want with me? . . . hasn't she done enough? . . . *he* wouldn't let her hurt me . . . oo, if he knew . . . her lying there and rotting where I should be . . ."

Mrs. Ambejian thought of her sister's son, but the breath of Miss Graes' terror blew the thought away.

". . . strangers will lie around me . . . alone, alone . . . and she will suck *his* strength . . . what will become of me?"

Abruptly, Mrs. Ambejian bent the white needles in her sweating hands. "Look!" she exclaimed loudly. "I know a man —" Then, seeing the mirror there, she dropped her voice, leaned forward, whispering, "She is a witch! I know a man. I tell you, when a child is sick he kills the evil eye. And when that worthless girl wanted to take Aranha from his wife — Look, I will get him. I myself will pay. You wait —"

Her black eyes flashed. She took her knitting up. She rose. "You stay here, dear. You rest. I will bring him."

She went away, and gradually the chair began to rock again, and the sinking sun sent its cold fingers to the mirror's rim, as though to waken it. And all the while, Miss Graes felt the mirror waiting there, and told herself that *he* would not have been so fond of it if he had known.

". . . *he'd* not have laughed at her . . . *he* would have cast her out . . . 'poor crazy Annie' . . . a witch! a witch! a witch! . . . 'turned inside out' indeed! . . . what will become of me? . . . let the dead lie, I always say . . ."

And so her thoughts ran on, until the room began to dim and Mrs. Ambejian came back with the man.

He was a big, dark man with ugly eyes. His nose had once been broken. He had not shaved. And Mrs. Ambejian must have told him a great deal, because he sat there quietly, listening without a word while Miss Graes talked and talked. Sometimes he shrugged. Sometimes he frowned. Sometimes he shook his head. Once he walked noiselessly toward the stairs, and

stood there staring at the mirror for a time. Finally, when Miss Graes had nothing more to say, he spread his hands. "I do not understand," he said to Mrs. Ambejian. "Perhaps it is true, what she says. Perhaps the big glass is a gate for this dead woman. Maybe it can bring her back through time. Such things have taken place. But I see nothing in the glass. I feel nothing in it. To me, it seems only what it is, a glass."

"You mean — you cannot help?"

"I can do nothing. It may be she is —" He tapped his forehead. "If she is not, then she must help herself." He bent down to Miss Graes. "You listen, miss!" he said. "This one, who is dead, is not as strong as you. If she is there, then you must fight. You are much stronger, because you are alive — you understand?"

Miss Graes whimpered.

He grasped her shoulder. "You must hate, hate, hate. That will make you more strength. You must not be afraid. Tonight you sleep. Tomorrow you will walk toward the mirror, until you see her. And you must break her soul. After that, if she is there at all, she will remain dead, and cannot hurt you. You will do this, yes?"

Weakly, Miss Graes nodded.

Then the man went away, but before he went he took the mirror down, and set it on the floor against the wall. "There," he told her, "now it will face you when you come downstairs."

When he had gone, Mrs. Ambejian closed the shop, and helped Miss Graes up into the house. She cooked for her, and made her eat, and — fearfully — promised to aid her with prayers to various saints. She did not leave until she was quite certain that Miss Graes was sound asleep.

Miss Graes awakened shortly before dawn. The cold had crept over the blanket's edge into her shoulders, and for a few moments she was conscious only of the cold. Then memory returned, slowly, piece by piece, bringing foreboding with it, and despair.

She lay there, fingering the cold, stiff coverlet. She tried to cry. She watched the drab grey light outline the window-frame. She watched it brighten, and flow into the room, and taint the faded paper of the walls. She saw it redden — a dull, burnished glow — like that of coals — like that reflected glow which *he* had watched . . .

She saw it redden — and suddenly her fear fell away, and hatred came. It was not weak. It did not pulse in some forgotten recess of her mind. But it was hot. It surged. It drove away the cold. It gave her strength — *his* strength. It gave her hope — a senseless hope that somehow not only might she break that threatening soul, but purge the body from its stolen grave.

She rose. Deliberately, she went into the kitchen, and ate and drank, feeding that hatred and that sudden power. She dressed, and made her way downstairs into the shop.

The mirror, nearly as tall as she, was waiting there. Its bevelled glass sat sullenly within its squared oak frame. It seemed asleep, and she advanced a pace or two before she realized that it was not. A dark flash shone across it, and in its darker depths the shadows moved, and in her mind the ghost of her despair rose up against her strength . . .

The shadows were advancing from the frame. Miss Graes moved forward, staring, inch by inch. She clenched her brittle fingers into fists. The shadows came to meet her, bright and black.

They came toward her, outward from the frame. They tipped; they tilted; sluggishly, they started to revolve, dimming the morning. Around they whirled — faster, faster, faster. They formed a vortex. The light dissolved. Inward, inch by endless inch, the vortex drew Miss Graes toward the mirror, and toward —

Miss Graes stopped, holding herself back, searching the whirlpool shadows for the witch. And there was no one there. There was emptiness.

Armed with her hatred, then, Miss Graes went on. The vortex drew her in. It seized her. Subtly, it penetrated every single cell. Its dreadful darkness swallowed up the light, devoured the shadows, dissolved the empty mirror. It stripped the hatred from her like a husk.

It held her there. For a brief instant, she underwent its force, compressing her, expanding from within — a strange sensation, almost as though, quite painlessly, she was being turned inside out.

Then she was aware only of the rain. When the man who had been, and who again would be her father, asked who she was, she did not know.



We have long known Larry Goldman as the author of several mystery novels, including the fine TIGER BY THE TAIL; of certain of the better, if less printable, limericks; and (acme of versatility!) of the California state test for drivers' licenses. Now we're happy to present his debut in the field of light but logical fantasy, with this proof that even the problems of technological unemployment can be vanquished by the right man . . . with the right magic.

Temporarily at Liberty

by LAWRENCE GOLDMAN

OF COURSE it was only temporary, but . . . the Great Carlisle was beginning to get discouraged. He tried not to think how long it had been since his last engagement — and as for the Palace . . . Let's see; there must be some manager's office he hadn't haunted during the past month.

He'd just left Trottman's. Trottman supplied entertainment for clubs, lodges, stags.

"For God's sake, man," Carlisle had blurted unbelievably. "They must sometimes want a little variety! They can't look at naked women all night long!"

Trottman stared at him vacantly. "Can't they?"

He hoped no one had seen him leaving Trottman's. The Great Carlisle had reached a decision. He'd put it off from month to month against that hypothetical day he didn't really believe would come, the day when he was really down and out. Well, the day had come.

He pushed open the big door at Warfield's as though he had every right to enter. It should be something fairly bulky the first time, but not too valuable. If anything went wrong — not that anything could — perhaps the consequences would vary with the value. He wasn't sure.

On the fourth floor he saw the blankets. The very thing. He fingered a beautiful blue Hudson's Bay four-pointer thoughtfully.

"Do you mind?" he asked the girl. "I'd like to see the color in the daylight."

"Not at all," she said pleasantly.

His heart pounded like a triphammer. One corner of the blanket slipped and trailed on the floor. He grabbed it up awkwardly. He stood at the window a moment, rubbing the soft nap. Then, his rumpled prize tightly clutched in both hands, he walked deliberately to the escalator. He told himself not to be so nervous. After all, a man was a magician or he wasn't.

It was surprising to him that no one even looked up at him as he passed the ladies' ready-to-wear, the lingerie, the notions, on his way down. He could imagine the excitement upstairs, the whispered conferences.

As he neared the door another fear seized him — maybe they hadn't noticed him at all.

He needn't have worried. He was no sooner out of the door than they pounced. There were three of them.

"Where ya goin' with the blanket, buddy?"

"Lemme see your sales slip."

The third one only clapped a heavy hand on Carlisle's shoulder.

Carlisle looked completely bewildered. "Blanket? Sales slip? Haven't you gentlemen made some mistake?"

There was a growl from Number One, a raucous horse-laugh from Number Two. Number Three tightened his grip uncomfortably.

Then both laugh and growl spiraled into a sort of strangled gulp duet.

The three detectives stared with popping eyes at Carlisle's empty hands.

"Do I understand you are arresting me?" the Great Carlisle asked mildly.

The three continued to gape.

"Are you arresting me?" Carlisle spoke a little sharply.

They came to life then. Through mumbles he caught words like "mistake" and "sorry." Number Three removed his hand from Carlisle's shoulder, made an apologetic, ineffectual motion as if to brush off the spot where it had rested. They retreated with many a backward glance, whispering loudly among themselves. The Great Carlisle shrugged, started down the street, arms swinging freely at his sides, his light coat flapping open.

That night he was snug, for the first time since the nippy weather began.

He spent a good hour in Warfield's book department next day. He was pleased to run across a fine edition of the memoirs of Robert-Houdin.

There was a door nearby, but Carlisle walked the full length of the store to the opposite street. The books were pretty heavy.

They were more cautious this time. They didn't touch him, but stopped him by a strategic planting of bulk. All eyes were on his overladen arms.

Craftily, Number Two asked, "Got a match, friend?"

"Sure." Carlisle clapped both hands to his trouser pocket, offered a packet of matches. The books did not fall to the sidewalk. They were gone.

The detectives' jaws dropped open, and funny noises came out.

"I say," Carlisle exclaimed. "Aren't you the fellows who stopped me yesterday?"

They mumbled unintelligible words, meanwhile rubbing and touching him with elephantine subtlety. The Great Carlisle didn't mind.

When he felt they'd had enough, he said, "This is beginning to be annoying. I wish you'd cut it out. Understand?"

They understood. They turned white about the jowls. They vanished almost as neatly as had the double armful of books.

During the nights that followed, the Great Carlisle, propped up in bed, read the memoirs of the amazing Robert-Houdin. Sometimes he lowered the book to gaze with satisfaction at the sky-blue expanse of virgin wool, or at the fine redwood hutch for Houdini the rabbit, or the big motor saw he'd thought might come in handy someday when the Palace opened again . . . or the sparkling criss-crossed surface of the Virginia sugar-cured ham from Warfield's attractive provisions department.

The detectives never bothered him again as he dragged one awkward object or another through the store, but he could feel them behind him. As the days passed the little fund of cash from the Palace days began to show bottom. The Great Carlisle grew anxious. The next move was definitely up to Warfield's.

He was making his way down the aisle with a large table radio when it happened. The tap on his shoulder startled him so that he vanished the radio then and there.

The carnation he turned to face was so sumptuous, the mustache so exquisitely waxed, that he knew instantly this was no ordinary floorwalker. And when he was ushered through a door marked **MANAGER**, he sat down in a proffered chair with a sigh of relief.

The manager said, "We have been observing you for some time, Mr.

Carlisle." He smiled amiably. "I caught your act at the Palace one time."

Carlisle's heart warmed. "Really?"

"Yes. Remarkable." That seemed to take care of the amenities. "Mr. Carlisle, a department store is a tremendous, complicated organization. One must think of everything, foresee every eventuality." The manager balanced a pencil delicately between two forefingers. "We here at Warfield's have discussed the possibility of someone with your, ah, talents, applying them to the trade of shoplifting."

"Suppose we don't call it shoplifting," suggested Carlisle.

"Suppose we do," said the manager firmly. "Shoplifting raised to a plane of artistry, if you will, esthetically perfect . . . but still shoplifting."

Carlisle inclined his head.

"We discussed it, as I said — and we planned our action."

For a moment Carlisle's heart sank.

"Mr. Carlisle, on Warfield's cost sheet is an opening for a special field representative, and I believe you'll be just the man."

"Special field representative?"

"The duties of a special field representative," the manager said, "are, chiefly, to remain in the field — that is, away from the store." He accented the last four words with light taps of his pencil.

Carlisle seemed to turn the offer over in his mind. "And the, er . . .?"

The direct business mind of the manager went right to the point. "The salary is one hundred and fifty dollars a week."

The Great Carlisle smiled. "I drew two-fifty at the Palace."

The manager shrugged apologetically. "The cost sheet — it allows only one hundred and fifty."

"Well . . ."

The manager stood up. "Your check will be mailed to you on Fridays."

"The . . . things," Carlisle hesitated. "I'll return them. Most of them," he added hastily, remembering the ham.

He thought of something else. "Oh . . . here."

The manager found his arms sagging under the weight of a large table radio, the ninety-seven fifty special for that week only.

At the door the Great Carlisle turned around. "Of course you understand this is not permanent." A wistful note crept into his voice. "Only until vaudeville picks up again."

A time machine has been described as everything from a thing of "nickel . . . ivory . . . and twisted crystalline bars" to an abstract formula involving $\sqrt{-1}$. It took the fresh approach of Gene Hunter to reveal that the trip through time might, in a perfectly normal and convincing manner, occur on a streetcar. And with the same fresh realism, Mr. Hunter describes time travel in terms, not of tomorrow's galaxies, but of today's Suburbia, not of the Intertemporal Patrol, but of thirteen-year-old Bobby Holcomb. This is a story which brings you no time-travel marvels of another age, past or future — only the quietly perturbing realization of what an encounter with your self-at-another-time-point might mean.

Journey

by GENE HUNTER

It didn't strike him that this particular morning was different from any other until he was in the bathroom, splashing cold water on his face. Then it hit him so hard that he stopped and straightened up over the sink, staring at his face in the cloudy mirror.

"Bobby! Are you in the bathroom?"

He found his voice long enough to mutter a stammering: "Ye — yeah, Mom."

The woman on the other side of the door gasped. "For Heaven's sake! This is the first time in years I haven't had to shake you three times to get you up for school. Are you sick?"

"No, Mom."

"Well, hurry up for breakfast. It's nearly seven thirty." The sound of her footsteps faded away down the hall. Bobby Holcomb looked at himself in the mirror again, brushing away the fog that his breath made with a trembling hand.

Yesterday had been the Fifth of December, 1935. He had come home from school, played touch football out in the street for an hour and a half

before dinner, and later read the comics in his room instead of studying.

He was Bobby Holcomb, thirteen years old. He lived in Inglewood, California, he was in the eighth grade, and he was going to grow up to be a mining engineer and go to South America. He knew all that beyond a question.

But last night had been the Fifth of December, 1950. He had had dinner with his wife, Madge, read a book, and gone to bed. He was Robert Holcomb, twenty-eight, Los Angeles architect. He shared a suite of offices with his father's brother, Uncle Bill Holcomb. Before very long he'd be a full partner in the firm. When his uncle died or retired, he would take over the business.

Bobby Holcomb came back to the present, trembling as if he had seen a vision. "What the hell," he said in a hoarse, adolescent whisper.

He dried his face and left the bathroom. He was halfway downstairs before he noticed he'd forgotten to put on his socks and sneakers. He went back to his room and sat down on the edge of the bed.

He hated the office, and he hated Madge. He hated the '49 Pontiac convertible he drove to and from work every day, and he hated his home in suburban Sierra Bonita. He remembered the arguments when they had planned it. He had wanted Spanish stucco — Madge had wanted Colonial. They lived in a Colonial.

He was still sitting there on the bed with one sneaker in his hand when his mother called from the foot of the stairs.

"All right, Madge. I'm coming."

"What? Bobby, what did you say?"

"Huh? I'm sorry, Mom. Be right down."

He finished dressing and hurried down to breakfast in time to hear his mother saying: "I hope *you* can understand your son. *I* can't."

"Oh, now, Kay," Ben Holcomb said, "you women weren't meant to understand us men." He winked at his son. Bobby grinned feebly back.

Bobby ate his oatmeal without tasting it, concentrating on his sudden and upsetting dual memory. He was still too excited to recall very much of the past life of the 1950 Holcomb, but he knew him. He *was* him.

He was also Bobby Holcomb, age thirteen, and very close to being late for his first period class. His mother reminded him of that fact loudly. "See what I mean?" she said, appealing to her husband. "I have to say everything to him three times."

"Better hurry now, son," Ben Holcomb said gently. "It's getting late."

Bobby gulped down the last of his milk, scooped up the jacket and books beside him, and dashed for the door, stumbling over the big chair in the living room.

Kay Holcomb shook her head as if she suddenly realized she had brought a microcephalic idiot into the world, while her husband chuckled softly. "Don't worry," he said. "The boy's getting to that age, you know."

Out on the street, Bobby found himself in a turmoil. That future Robert Holcomb couldn't be him, he tried to reason. He was going to grow up and go to South America. That was the only future he talked, thought, or dreamed about. Yet the clarity of that other life so forced itself upon him that his head began to ache.

Then suddenly he knew that for the first time in his life, he was going to play hooky. He was going to Los Angeles.

He had to find out.

He still had the dollar allowance his father had grudgingly advanced him the night before. That would more than pay his carfare, and he had his school lunch under his arm with his books. Having no idea what his clandestine trip might avail him, he started running towards Market Street, bent on catching the streetcar that would take him into the city.

He wasn't conscious of when it happened, but somewhere between Inglewood and L.A. the scene from the coach window changed. Buildings and street signs that Robert Holcomb would recognize at once but that *Bobby* Holcomb had never known came into view. Sleek, streamlined cars snaked past the window like something out of Flash Gordon.

His heart was still beating wildly when the coach lumbered into the heart of town and he jumped off into the maze that was Los Angeles, circa 1950.

The building housing the offices of Holcomb and Holcomb had not existed in 1935, but Bobby made his way to it with the assurance of one who had been there many times. Which, he recalled, he had — but never as thirteen-year-old Bobby Holcomb.

He rode the elevator to the eighth floor, got out, and walked to the Holcomb suite, rooms 816-20. He was pushing the door open when his nerve began to fail. He started to withdraw, but it was too late.

Miss Meadows, "his" secretary, was already staring at him curiously, trying to remember where she might have seen this youngster before.

"Yes?" she asked hesitantly.

"I — I want to see Mr. Holcomb," Bobby said, his voice quavering.

"Mr. *William* Holcomb? He isn't in."

"No ma'm. Mr. Robert Holcomb."

"Oh." Miss Meadows studied him. "Are — are you his nephew?"

"No ma'm. I just — want to see him."

"He's rather busy," Miss Meadows began, but her curiosity bested her.

"Well," she added dubiously, "I'll ask him."

She spoke briefly into the inter-office phone, and Bobby heard his adult voice reply: "Oh, very well. I'm coming out anyway, Miss Meadows."

Hearing that voice did things to what little nerve Bobby Holcomb had left. Trembling, he turned and dashed out of the office, leaving his books and his lunch lying on the polished oak desk.

Architect Robert Holcomb saw only a flash of faded blue dungarees as his young counterpart sped out the door and into the corridor. "What," he asked Miss Meadows, "was that?"

"A little boy," the secretary said, puzzled. "And Mr. Holcomb — he looked just like a juvenile edition of yourself."

"Miss Meadows," Holcomb said sternly, "as far as I know, I have no 'juvenile editions' of myself running about Los Angeles."

"Oh, no sir," Miss Meadows said, blushing. "I only meant . . ."

Her voice faded. Robert Holcomb walked around her desk and picked up one of the school books. He opened it idly, and then froze as he saw the name scrawled on the fly-leaf.

Bobby Holcomb didn't stop until he had reached the bottom of the eight flights of stairs. He leaned against the concrete wall of the towering office building, frightened and panting for breath. He was certain, now. Certain of something he didn't want to accept, but which was being forced on him.

He rested there for a while, getting his breath. Then he walked on down Spring Street, trying to decide his next move. He was still determined to see and talk to this 1950 Robert Holcomb, but he lacked the nerve to return to the office. Better to kill the day in town, he decided, and see Holcomb at his home that night.

He scanned the theater marquees, looking for a Tom Keene or a Buck Jones picture before he remembered. He shrugged. He was *two* Robert Hol-

combs now — Robert and Bobby. Perhaps a western wouldn't entertain him as it had before.

He wound up seeing a Bob Hope-Gregory Peck double feature, where he had to force his mind entirely on being the older Robert Holcomb to enjoy himself or understand. When the pictures ended, he was so much his other self that he noticed with some surprise his boyish, thirteen-year-old body when he emerged into the afternoon sun.

His head was aching again, both from the unaccustomed luxury of a morning movie and his futile attempts to puzzle out his dual personality. He watched a group of young women walk past. They ignored him, but his eyes followed them, wonderingly. At thirteen, he was too young to feel anything but an adolescent curiosity toward them, yet in his mind he knew what it was like to be married for four years. His head was nearly splitting.

He brushed his hand across his face and walked on down the street, wandering aimlessly. A clock in a jeweler's window said 1:15. He remembered that he — Robert Holcomb, 1950 — usually left the office at noon when his uncle was gone, and Miss Meadows had told him William Holcomb was out. Perhaps . . .

He quickened his pace, making his way down crowded Sixth Street to the Pacific Electric Terminal on the corner of Main. He had barely enough money to buy a one-way fare to Sierra Bonita and a candy bar. He munched the candy as the streetcar got underway, regretting the fact that he'd left his lunch behind with his books on Miss Meadows' desk.

For the first time, Bobby had a look at himself as he would look — *did* look — as an adult. The result was not too bad, he decided. The other Robert Holcomb didn't seem any too happy, but he presented a pleasing enough appearance. He was tall, slender in the right places, and his hair was growing a trifle thin at the temples, although remaining black and glossy.

Bobby watched from across the street while the older Holcomb puttered about the yard of the hated house on Manzanita Street.

Bobby was trying to make up his mind how best to approach the man, when the problem was solved for him. Holcomb straightened up to light a cigarette, and turning, saw Bobby standing on the opposite sidewalk. The two faced each other for a few seconds, then: "Hi, kid."

"H — hi."

Bobby walked across the asphalt street. Neither he nor the adult took their eyes off one another.

Holcomb looked at the boy closely. "You must be the boy who was in my office."

"Yes, sir," Bobby replied.

"Miss Meadows was right — you do look like me."

"Yes, sir. I do. That is — I am you, Mr. Holcomb."

Holcomb peered at the boy more closely. "By God," he said.

"I mean — you're me," Bobby said, "but fifteen years older."

Holcomb tossed away his cigarette and scratched his head. "Those school books — they're the same ones I used to study when I was a kid. I thought they'd be out of date by now. And that signature on the fly-leaf . . ."

"You understand what I mean, then?" Bobby said hopefully.

"I do, like hell."

Bobby was disappointed. He was becoming almost accustomed to this strange relationship. He started from the beginning, telling Holcomb all that had happened since awaking that morning.

When he finished, Holcomb lighted another cigarette. "It sounds good," he admitted, "but . . ."

Bobby watched the smoke curl upwards. "I started smoking when I was sixteen, didn't I?" he grinned. "Jimmy Martinez started me out on a dare."

Holcomb took another puff. "Who was your Math teacher in second year high?" he asked quickly.

Bobby frowned, concentrating. "Morris. We called him 'Twitchbottom'."

"Who was the first girl you ever kissed?"

Bobby grinned again. "I haven't met her yet, but it was Gladys Frankenburg. And I didn't just kiss her."

"Never mind," Holcomb snapped. "Look, kid — I don't know just what's coming off, but we've got some talking to do. Come on in the house."

Madge came out of the kitchen as they entered.

"Who's that?" she asked bluntly, staring at Bobby.

"This is Bobby, Madge," Holcomb answered, sighing a little at his wife's bad manners. "Bobby . . . Harris. I'm going to talk to him about doing some yard work."

"Why, for God's sake?" Madge wanted to know. "Frank does everything perfect."

"Perfectly," Holcomb said automatically.

He ignored his wife further and led Bobby on into the den. "That," he said when he had closed the door, "is my wife."

"Yeah," Bobby said. "I know."

"Oh — of course you do," Holcomb reflected. "I'm not sure I like that."

The den was just as Bobby knew it would be. Three sides of the room were covered with bookshelves, many of them containing volumes in English or Spanish about Latin America. A few were technical manuals.

There was a flattering portrait of Madge above the fireplace, and, oddly enough, a framed photograph of Dolores Del Rio on the desk.

Bobby nodded towards the photograph. "I saw her last week in a movie with Richard Dix . . ." he told Holcomb. "It was good, except for the love parts. I don't go for that."

"You will," Holcomb observed dryly.

There was silence for a few moments. Bobby saw his school books and lunch that Holcomb had brought from the office out of curiosity, and suddenly remembered how hungry he was. He opened the sack and pulled out a sandwich. *A sandwich made fifteen years ago*, he thought.

"Look, kid," the adult Holcomb said at length, "what are your plans? What do you want to do when you finish school?"

Bobby shrugged. "You know." He waved toward the books. "I want to study engineering — go to South America."

"And you know what happened — to me?"

Bobby thought back. "You got out of the Army five years ago. You already knew Madge. You — you liked her."

"I was hot for her," Holcomb said bitterly. "The folks were crazy about her, and Uncle Bill had come out from Chicago to open an office in L.A. It wasn't hard for all of them to talk me into switching to architecture and go in business with him."

Bobby took up the thread of the story. "Mom convinced you that you couldn't run all over South America and take Madge with you. She wanted grandchildren and she wanted you to stick close to home."

Holcomb nodded. "So I started studying architecture."

He stood up, looking at Bobby. "Kid, I've regretted it ever since. Once I tried to break away. I left Madge, but it didn't work. What little I knew once about engineering, I'd grown rusty on."

"Mr. Holcomb," Bobby said, for want of something better to call his mature self, "what about me? What happened this morning? I think I'm getting scared again."

"I don't know," Holcomb said, sitting down again. "It's out of my line — over my head."

He thought for a while, then said: "Maybe something happened to Inglewood that day — this morning, rather. Maybe there was a small quake that warped something in space or time. Maybe the supposedly perfectly balanced world we live in got twisted up somehow, setting off a vibration attuned to your mind — I don't know."

"Somehow," Bobby said, "I must have gotten tossed into two different worlds at once."

Holcomb nodded. "Something like that. Maybe the ego that is you — that *was* myself — got pushed forward into a variable future world."

Bobby's head was swimming. "But then, wouldn't *you* remember the same thing happening to you when *you* were thirteen?"

The question came as a bombshell to the older Holcomb. He held his head in his hands, thinking furiously. Finally he looked up. "One time when I was about your age," he said, "I can remember ditching school and hopping a streetcar to L.A. I know I went to a movie." He thought for a moment. "I remember — when I was on my way home, I dozed off. When I woke up, I realized how stupid I'd been. *And I couldn't remember the picture, or what I did before starting back home!*"

Bobby, who had been intent on the second sandwich, suddenly forgot it, realizing the meaning of Holcomb's words.

The older man leaped to his feet. "Don't you see?" he cried. "This happened to me, and I forgot. I could have saved myself, and I *forgot*."

He walked over to the boy, gripping him by the shoulder until it hurt. "Listen," he said. "Maybe there's a chance. Maybe *you* can remember. You've *got* to remember. When you get back to Inglewood, you've got to remember the possible world you were in. *Do you understand?*"

Bobby nodded, speechless.

"When I got back," Holcomb went on, "I couldn't understand why the devil I'd done a thing like that, and when the old man found out I'd cut classes, I got a hell of a licking."

Bobby winced. "That reminds me," he said. "What time is it?"

Holcomb looked at his watch. "Almost seven," he said. "I'd better get you to L.A. so you can catch that streetcar. And damn you, *don't forget!*"

Holcomb parked the convertible at a corner, while they waited for the Inglewood streetcar. "I'd take you home," he said, "but frankly, I'm afraid of what might happen if we both went back."

Bobby said anxiously: "But — what if I can't get back?"

"You will — I think. The fact that I remember leaving and coming back that day should prove that. The fact that you're here should prove it."

"I — I guess so," Bobby answered, still confused. And he had still another worry now. He remembered his father's dexterity with a hairbrush when the occasion demanded. "Either way, I lose."

"Don't concentrate on anything except remembering what's happened today," Holcomb told him. "Otherwise, you'll wind up the same way I have — bitter and frustrated. You *can* become an engineer. If you want to do all those things you've dreamed about, you've *got* to remember all this. And maybe I'll live a little more peacefully in this world, knowing that in another I'm doing the things I want."

The streetcar came into view. Bobby opened the car door and jumped out. "I'll remember," he said, partly to himself. "So help me, I will."

He stood in the safety zone as the streetcar ground to a stop. He jumped aboard. The last words he ever heard from the other Holcomb were: "For God's sake, don't ever date Madge!"

Bobby grinned and waved. As the coach jerked, he sat down in the nearest seat, exhausted. In front of him a man was reading the coming morning's edition of the *Examiner*. Bobby looked at the date. December 7th, 1950.

His eyes were heavy. He had to fight to hold up his head. Every time he felt himself about to doze, he jerked erect. He had to stay awake. Everything — literally, everything — depended on it.

He watched the lights flash by in the darkness as he neared home. He couldn't tell, in that darkness, if anything had changed or not.

He turned around, and the man in the seat ahead was gone. He looked about him wildly. In the seat across the aisle lay another newspaper. He grabbed it, his hands trembling.

He blinked, then sighed. He settled down in his seat, grinning. He still remembered. The impending licking didn't seem nearly so ominous now.

In that modern classic, THE MARTIAN CHRONICLES, Ray Bradbury has revealed three of the disastrous ends that may befall Earth's expeditions to Mars. But there are other such accounts, equally poetic and tragic, not collected in the CHRONICLES, such as the one we bring you here: one of the author's least known stories (it has previously appeared only in that admirable and lamented journal of limited circulation, "The Arkham Sampler"), but authentic Bradbury — which means the capture of an instant of Man's future in all its pity and terror.

The One Who Waits

by RAY BRADBURY

I LIVE in a well. I live like smoke in the well. Like vapor in a stone throat. I don't move. I don't do anything but wait. Overhead, I see the cold stars of night and morning, and I see the sun. And sometimes I sing old songs of this world when it was young. How can I tell you what I am when I don't know? I cannot. I am simply waiting. I am mist and moonlight and memory. I am sad and I am old. Sometimes I fall like rain into the well. Spider webs are startled into forming where my rain falls fast, on the water surface. I wait in cool silence and there will be a day when I no longer wait.

Now it is morning. I hear a great thunder. I smell red fire from a distance. I hear a metal crashing. I wait. I listen.

Voices. Far away.

"All right!"

One voice. An alien voice. An alien tongue I cannot know. No word is familiar. I listen.

"Send the men out!"

A crunching in crystal sands.

"So this is Mars!"

"Where's the flag?"

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"Here you are, sir."

"Good, good."

The sun is high in the blue sky and its golden rays fill the well and I hang like a flower pollen, invisible and misting in the warm light.

Voices.

"In the name of the Government of Earth, I proclaim this to be the Martian Territory, to be equally divided among the member nations."

"Amen."

What are they saying? I turn in the sun, like a wheel, invisible and lazy, golden and tireless.

"What's over here?"

"A well!"

"No!"

"Come on and see."

The approach of warmth. Three objects bend over the well mouth and my coolness rises to the objects.

"Good!"

"Think it's good water?"

"We'll see."

"Someone get a bucket."

"I will!"

A sound of running. The return.

"Here we are."

I wait.

"Let it down on the rope. Easy."

The water ripples softly as the bucket touches and fills. I rise in the warm air toward the well-mouth.

"Here we are. You want to test this water, Regent?"

"Let's have it."

"What a beautiful well. Look at that construction. How old you think it is?"

"God knows. When we landed in that other town yesterday Smith said there hasn't been life on Mars in ten thousand years."

"Imagine."

"How is it, Regent? The water."

"Pure as silver. Have a glass."

The sound of water in the hot sunlight. Now I hover like a dust, a cinnamon, upon the soft wind.

"What's the matter, Jones?"

"I don't know. Got a terrific headache. All of a sudden."

"Did you drink the water yet?"

"No, I haven't. It's not that. I was just bending over the well and all of a sudden, my head split. I feel better now."

Now I know who I am.

My name is Stephen Leonard Jones and I am 23 years old and I have just come in a rocket from a planet called Earth and I am standing with my good friends Regent and Shaw by an old well on the planet Mars.

I look down at my golden fingers, tan and strong. I look at my long legs and at my silver uniform and at my friends.

"What's wrong, Jones?" they say.

"Nothing," I say, looking at them. "Nothing at all."

The food is good. It has been ten thousand years since food. It touches the tongue in a fine way and the wine with the food is warming. I listen to the sound of voices. I make words that I do not understand but somehow understand. I test the air.

"What's the matter, Jones?"

I tilt this head of mine and rest my hands holding the silver utensils of eating. I feel everything.

"What do you mean?" this voice, this new thing of mine, says.

"You keep breathing funny. Coughing," says the other one.

I pronounce exactly. "Maybe a little cold coming on."

"Check with the doc later."

I nod my head and it is good to nod. It is good to do several things after ten thousand years. It is good to breathe the air and it is good to feel the sun in the flesh deep and going deeper and it is good to feel the structure of ivory, the fine skeleton hidden in the warming flesh, and it is good to hear sounds much clearer and more immediate than they were in the stone deepness of a well. I sit enchanted.

"Come out of it, Jones. Snap it. We got to move!"

"Yes," I say, hypnotized with the way the word forms like water on the tongue and falls with slow beauty out into the air.

I walk and it is good walking. I stand high and it is a long way to the

ground when I look down from my eyes and my head. It is like living on a fine cliff and being happy there.

Regent stands by the stone wall, looking down. The others have gone murmuring to the silver ship from which they came.

I feel the fingers of my hand and the smile of my mouth.

"It is deep," I say.

"Yes."

"It is called a Soul Well."

Regent raises his head and looks at me. "How do you know that?"

"Doesn't it look like one?"

"I never heard of a Soul Well."

"A place where waiting things, things that once had flesh, wait and wait," I say, touching his arm.

The sand is fire and the ship is silver fire in the hotness of the day and the heat is good to feel. The sound of my feet in the hard sand. I listen. The sound of the wind and the sun burning the valleys. I smell the smell of the rocket boiling in the noon. I stand below the port.

"Where's Regent?" someone says.

"I saw him by the well," I reply.

One of them runs toward the well. I am beginning to tremble. A fine shivering tremble, hidden deep, but becoming very strong. And for the first time I hear it, as if it, too, were hidden in a well. A voice calling deep within me, tiny and afraid. And the voice cries, Let me go, let me go, and there is a feeling as if something was trying to get free, a pounding of labyrinthine doors, a rushing down dark corridors and up passages, echoing and screaming.

"Regent's in the well!"

The men are running, all five of them. I run with them but now I am sick and the trembling is violent.

"He must have fallen. Jones, you were here with him. Did you see? Jones? Well, speak up, man."

"What's wrong, Jones?"

I fall to my knees, the trembling is so bad.

"He's sick. Here, help me with him."

"The sun."

"No, not the sun," I murmur.

They stretch me out and the seizures come and go like earthquakes and the deep hidden voice in me cries: This is Jones, this is *me*, that's not him, that's not him, don't believe him, let me out, let me out! And I look up at the bent figures and my eyelids flicker. They touch my wrists.

"His heart is acting up."

I close my eyes. The screaming stops. The shivering ceases.

I rise, as in a cool well, released.

"He's dead," says someone.

"Jones is dead."

"From what?"

"Shock, it looks like."

"What kind of shock?" I say, and my name is Sessions and my lips move crisply, and I am the captain of these men. I stand among them and I am looking down at a body which lies on the sands. I clap both hands to my head.

"Captain!"

"It's nothing," I say, crying out. "Just a headache. I'll be all right. There. There," I whisper. "It's all right now."

"We'd better get out of the sun, sir."

"Yes," I say, looking down at Jones. "We should never have come. Mars doesn't want us."

We carry the body back to the rocket with us, and a new voice is calling deep in me to be let out.

"Help, help." Far down in the moist earthenworks of the body. "Help, help!" in red fathoms, echoing and pleading.

The trembling starts much sooner this time. The control is less steady.

"Captain, you'd better get in out of the sun, you don't look too well, sir."

"Yes," I say. "Help," I say.

"What, sir?"

"I didn't say anything."

"You said, 'Help,' sir."

"Did I, Mathews, did I?"

The body is laid out in the shadow of the rocket and the voice screams in the deep underwater catacombs of bone and crimson tide. My hands jerk. My mouth splits and is parched. My nostrils fasten wide. My eyes roll. Help, help, oh help, don't, don't, let me out, don't, don't.

"Don't," I say.

"What, sir?"

"Never mind," I say. "I've got to get free," I say. I clap my hand to my mouth.

"How's that, sir?" cries Mathews.

"Get inside, all of you, go back to Earth!" I shout.

A gun is in my hand. I lift it.

"Don't, sir!"

An explosion. Shadows run. The screaming is cut off. There is a whistling sound of falling through space.

After ten thousand years, how good to die. How good to feel the sudden coolness, the relaxation. How good to be like a hand within a glove that stretches out and grows wonderfully cold in the hot sand. Oh, the quiet and the loveliness of gathering, darkening death. But one cannot linger on.

A crack, a snap.

"Good God, he's killed himself!" I cry, and open my eyes and there is the captain lying against the rocket, his skull split by a bullet, his eyes wide, his tongue protruding between his white teeth. Blood runs from his head. I bend to him and touch him. "The fool," I say. "Why did he do that?"

The men are horrified. They stand over the two dead men and turn their heads to see the Martian sands and the distant well where Regent lies lolling in deep waters. A croaking comes out their dry lips, a whimpering, a childish protest against this awful dream.

The men turn to me.

After a long while, one of them says, "That makes you captain, Mathews."

"I know," I say, slowly.

"Only six of us left."

"Good God, it happened so quick!"

"I don't want to stay here, let's get out!"

The men clamor. I go to them and touch them now, with a confidence which almost sings in me. "Listen," I say, and touch their elbows or their arms or their hands.

We all fall silent.

We are one.

No, no, no, no, no, no! Inner voices crying, deep down and gone into prisons beneath exteriors.

We are looking at each other. We are Samuel Mathews and Raymond Moses and William Spaulding and Charles Evans and Forrest Cole and John Summers, and we say nothing but look upon each other and our white faces and shaking hands.

We turn, as one, and look at the well.

"Now," we say.

No, no, six voices scream, hidden and layered down and stored forever.

Our feet walk in the sand and it is as if a great hand with twelve fingers was moving across the hot sea bottom.

We bend to the well, looking down. From the cool depths six faces peer back up at us.

One by one we bend until our balances are gone, and one by one drop into the mouth and down through cool darkness into the cold waters.

The sun sets. The stars wheel upon the night sky. Far out, there is a wink of light. Another rocket coming, leaving red marks on space.

I live in a well. I live like smoke in a well. Like vapor in a stone throat. Overhead, I see the cold stars of night and morning, and I see the sun. And sometimes I sing old songs of this world when it was young. How can I tell you what I am when even I don't know? I cannot.

I am simply waiting.



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Wilson Tucker's first detective novel, THE CHINESE DOLL, delighted science fiction fans with its knowledgeable references to the Fantasy Amateur Press Association and allied matters, and roused the bitter envy of many detective story writers (including one of your editors) by presenting an absolutely new solution gimmick which those writers had been striving for years to fit into a story. The fans will be more than happy that Mr. Tucker now turns from detection to fantasy, and writers will once again envy the Tucker ability to formulate a completely fresh concept, as he uses the terse hardness of crime-writing to tell of a racketeer who knew all the answers . . . until his brother married Something that fitted none of them.

My Brother's Wife

by WILSON TUCKER

THERE are three of us — three brothers.

Harley is the oldest of the trio and in many ways the weakest. The family had been in the habit of telling each other Harley would go far someday. Harley went as far as a downstate mental asylum. He's been in there for several months and I can't get in to see him, not with the family balking me, not with my record.

Louise put him there.

Jimmy is the youngest, he's a born hell-raiser but strictly on the legit side. The kind of a guy you don't have to dare to do something — he will plunge in and tackle it just for the hell of the thing. But it has to be on the level. He uses *me* as the shining example of what not to be. Jimmy was in the air force during the war and spent most of his time overseas flying the Hump, messing around in some of those nameless pockets in Burma. He likes to brag about the time he flew Stilwell.

Jimmy is married to Louise. I don't see her, either.

In age, I'm between those two brothers but there is no other resemblance, and as any member of the family will tell you in nice language, I'm not worth

a tinker's dam. The old black sheep label was pinned on me early — a stretch in the reform school when I was seventeen because I had figured out a way to make, and use, a black powder bomb after watching a Paul Muni gangster picture. And a lush but rugged pre-war life out on Chicago's southwest side while toting a gun for a ward heeler, at the magnificent sum of a hundred bucks a week.

That was all washed up when they drafted me; the only thing that changed was the clothes and the pay. I went right on toting a gun for thirty bucks a month and grub until Congress got big hearted and raised the pay. And I got smart and bought me a softer job driving a car for the brass.

I'm back on my own now, working for nobody but myself and still carrying a gun for sentimental reasons. I've been waiting a long time to get my sights on Jimmy's wife.

People tell me she's a knock-out, something a movie scout should stumble over. I wouldn't know — I've never laid eyes on her although she and the kid brother have lived in Chicago for over a year. He runs his own bookstore down near the Loop, something he bought with the money he saved up during the war plus his discharge dough. When I first found out what he wanted, I made it a little easier for him to buy out the former owner at a reasonable price. I keep a boy down there working for him to see nothing goes wrong — some dope might get the bright idea that a bookstore, like a dry cleaning joint, could be in the market for protection.

I am *not* welcome in his house unless she is away from home. So I always telephone in advance.

I drop around for an evening of bull and beer every once in a while to pick up the news on Harley and the folks, and to study Jimmy. We get along fine and he'd be a helluva swell guy to chin with if only he'd shut up that bragging about what he did in the war. I keep wondering what he's thinking about and never find out. I always ask him how the store is coming along and is he making any money, and he usually tells me it's rolling in — which I already know. But he never says a word about how he's getting along with her and he never asks about my business. We leave it at that, but I keep wondering.

I usually slip him some dough and he passes it along to the family with a donation of his own, because we both know Mom would refuse it if she guessed it was coming from me. Once in a while he has a fresh word on

Harley but it is always bad — the guy will never snap out of it. And that's the point of the matter.

Louise is responsible for Harley being in the hatch, and I keep wondering if Jimmy knows that.

I used to ask about her, back at the beginning. Used to wonder out loud when I'd get to meet my nifty new sister-in-law, used to pass out hints I was entitled to a kiss. He became embarrassed every time I brought up the subject. He parried my questions with unsatisfactory answers and offered all kinds of feeble excuses for her continued absence. The hints brought me nothing but pained silences. After a while I began to get the idea and one night I asked him about it.

"I never have seen her, kid. What's the inside — that black sheep stuff again?"

He avoided my eyes and wasted several seconds reading the small print on the beer label. Somewhere in the house a gnawing rodent sounded loud in the silence.

"Come on," I coaxed him, "I'm not going to get mad."

He jerked back his shoulders and stared at me. I had the answer before he opened his mouth.

"I'm awfully sorry, Bud. I guess I opened my mouth once too often, or maybe Mom tipped her off, I don't know. I guess she's afraid of you, Bud. It's a crazy idea and I've told her a hundred times you're my own brother and wouldn't hurt a fly, but — well, you know women."

Yeah, I knew women, knew lots of them, but she was the first one I'd found who was afraid to shake hands with me. It didn't sound right, didn't tie in with her background; she'd hung around plenty of tough characters in the Burma country.

"She's seen too many bad movies," he went on, "or read too many books I guess — even over there. She thinks you're a cross between a bloody newspaper gangster and a storm trooper." He ran his hand through his hair and there was something else on his mind, something he didn't tell me. He was embarrassed. "I can't help it, Bud, and I apologize for it, but hell, that's the way it is."

That was the way it was.

By "even over there" he meant her homeplace, somewhere in Burma or India or wherever the hell he picked her up. He said once it was a mudtown

called Walawbum but I couldn't find it on a map. He found her there and I suppose you can find anything and everything in that country if you stay long enough; she was, he told me later, a half caste of some sort, Russian and Chinese maybe, who had drifted around here and there with the coming of the Japanese war to the mainland.

If she was a half caste, I pointed out, how come the name Louise? He laughed and told me I couldn't pronounce her real name if I tried, so everybody called her Louise. Jimmy was positive on one point: she was as attractive as they come. The family took her in when he brought her home, which was equal to an underwriter's bond unless she mesmerized them.

"Well hell, kid," I said, "it's tough, not so much as getting to see her. Hey — got a picture around anywhere?"

He gave me a lopsided grin, half an apology and half a defense. "No, Bud. I'm sorry, but I can't even offer you that much. She won't stand still for it. She's the best wife in this whole cockeyed world today — she'll do anything for me, except that. She won't let me take her picture."

"What?"

"Nope, on the level. You see, that was one of the things she brought up when I married her." He broke off to stare at me, wondering just how much he could say. "To make it plain, Bud, before I could marry her I had to promise no pix. That was her one and only condition of marriage. I can't go back on my promise."

He wouldn't. I knew him too well for that.

"Religion or something?" I asked him.

He nodded absently. "I suppose so. She's from the backwoods over there, you know. People aren't so particular about what goes on around them but you'd better not step on their taboos. I married *her*, not her superstitions or whatever. She's got a lot of funny little tricks you'll never find out here in the civilized world, and I like every one of them."

I said I guessed I understood.

"She told me her ancestors would never forgive her if she permitted a photograph to be taken. And Bud, I don't want to get her in a jam with her ancestors." He was grinning at me in high humor but it faded. "I'm head over heels in love with her — and I don't want that to be jammed, either."

So I dropped the subject and kept hoping I'd meet her accidentally sometime, but I never did.

Harley had been different — Harley had come and gone as he pleased, when he pleased, saw her quite a lot. He went out with them, stayed in evenings with them, everybody got along fine. Until that night Jimmy called me from home to say the cops had carted Harley away to the hatch.

I suppose I could have stolen a picture of her, could have put a camera tail on her, or I could have tailed her myself and stopped her in the street if I wanted to go that far — but I didn't. Jimmy would raise hell and cut me off. And I didn't want that; his continued friendship and now my only contact with the family meant more to me than just satisfying my curiosity about his wife's looks. I didn't fully accept his explanation of the woman's refusal to meet me, but I said to hell with the whole thing and kept my nose to the grindstone.

Meanwhile I had developed a lead in the asylum.

I wasn't allowed inside. The family laid down the law there and my Cook County record backed them up, so I did the next best thing and picked up a man who was already on the inside. State employees are notoriously underpaid and this one was a greedy bugger who was more than willing to supplement his income, once I convinced him I wanted nothing more than reports on Harley. I began to get them. How he was getting along, his lack of real progress toward recovery, his flights of fancy, his treatment at the hands of the employees, and so forth.

His flights of fancy interested me. They always included Louise. He was crazy about Louise. Crazy.

He talked about her all the time and the words and sentences which were passed along to me didn't make sense. They made just as little sense to his doctors and his progress chart never improved. I put that down as natural in his condition until some of the words, coming in almost daily repetition, bored into me as being queerly unnatural. The more I mulled them over the more curious I grew as to what prompted them. I realized my lead wasn't enough.

The guy had a daily contact with Harley, he could pick up words like a phonograph record and play them back to me just as straight, he could look after him and steer him clear of some of the knocks, but he wasn't sufficiently informed to discuss Harley's case with me. I needed a doctor in the institution and most doctors followed their stupid code of ethics. Which meant I couldn't simply pick up the telephone and ask.

I looked over the hospital staff and began working on a new lead. He lived in Chicago, he wouldn't exchange his ethics for my money until he had great need of it. That might take several weeks, but I started in. A thief stole his car. Someone broke into his house one night and ruined his medical library. He was held up twice in one month. It went along like that and I bided my time.

But while I waited for him to soften I started backtracking.

Jimmy and Louise had lived for some months in San Diego after his discharge, and had then moved on to Phoenix. They spent a couple of years in Phoenix, finally coming to Chicago when the bookstore deal opened up and he decided it was his life. San Diego wouldn't be so difficult — I knew contacts there — but Phoenix was something else again.

In the end I hired a private eye to investigate the Phoenix story, and telephoned a friend in San Diego to look into things there. Some weeks went by and the Phoenix reply arrived first — the detective did a good job. Jimmy and his wife had lived there long enough to make an impression on the neighbors.

Jimmy was the same old Jimmy, in Phoenix. But Louise was somebody else. I kept Harley in mind and studied it.

Jimmy, according to the detective's innocent report, had been living with a different woman while in Arizona, but one who passed as his wife of course. Her name was Louise — the neighbors said she was a perfect darling. The Louise in Phoenix was painted so clearly in the report that I was able to picture her as I read it. Five-foot-one, about a hundred pounds, perhaps twenty-three years old, deep auburn hair worn in bangs, ice-blue eyes, freckled face, upturned nose, small mouth, slim neck, moderate bust, no appreciable hips, tiny feet, lively and vivacious. A carefree and childish manner, a casual dresser — usually slacks and shirt — and occasionally a dramatic burst of temper.

But that wasn't the Louise living in Chicago.

Several days afterward the man in San Diego called. It had been tougher there, their stay had been a shorter one, the neighbors not so observant, and many years had passed. The meager description my contact furnished said Jimmy was still Jimmy in San Diego, but Louise . . .

Louise was a raven-haired beauty with a throaty voice and a figure to make you turn and stare. The apartment house manager remembered her

because she had looked like Joan Bennett in the movies; there was such a striking resemblance that he had once asked for an autograph and had been rudely turned down. He remembered her beautiful black hair.

But that wasn't the Louise in Chicago, either.

Jimmy says she's a feast for the eyes — what he has always dreamed of. The tall, willowy girl you find in advertising models, a wealth of hair the color of ripe wheat on a bright summer day, hair that draped about her shoulders. She is almost as tall as Jimmy and he is five foot ten, she has the ice-blue eyes of the girl in Phoenix but the straight nose and gentle, curving lips of someone else. Skin as fine and clear as a child's, without a mar or blemish — no freckles. Rather flat-chested, as may be expected of a woman with her build, and a small hip line. That was Louise in Chicago.

Jimmy had changed wives three times and they were all the same girl — he pretended — that he had brought home from the Orient. Picture a half caste as a redhead with freckles, or a tall slim blonde. He had married her in Burma — he pretended — and she would stand for no nonsense about photographs. But he spent a lot of time thinking over something. My other brother, Harley, would be spending the rest of his life in an asylum because Louise had a lot of funny little tricks you'd never find out here in the civilized world.

It was time to pay another visit to his house. And as usual I phoned first that I was coming over, and as usual she was nowhere to be seen when I arrived. Jimmy and I settled in the kitchen with the beer. And somewhere a mouse or a rat was still raising hell in the woodwork.

"Say, kid, your wedding anniversary is coming up pretty soon, ain't it? What do you and the wife want?"

"Is it?" He frowned, put down the can of beer and counted his fingers. "By gosh, you're right. It slipped my mind. Aw — we don't need anything."

"That's not the point, you're going to get something just the same. What'll it be?" I laughed. "A jar of freckle cream for Louise?"

"She doesn't have freckles. You —" and he stopped in embarrassment, realizing that I did not know her face.

"The hell she doesn't! You said she did."

"I did? You're all wet, Bud. Her skin's like milk."

"Well, maybe I am, but I'd swear you said freckles in one of those old letters — from Phoenix I think, some time back."

He shook his head and traced a design on the table top, a long snaky line. "Guess I was mixed up, or you read it wrong. No freckles." He tried to keep the concern off his face.

"Skip it," I suggested. "Name something nice, then."

He was morose the rest of the evening and I got out of there early.

Harley was far gone — he had been put away for nearly a year with positively no sign of improvement — when my doctor finally got around to my point of view. It had taken him a long time to throw off the inner feeling that he was betraying himself and his profession, that he was accepting rotten money, but he finally reached the desperate stage when he could sit down and talk to me without too many mental reservations.

"What about Harley?" I asked him.

"Incurable. You should know that."

"Sure I know it. That's not why I'm here. I'm here to find out why Harley went that way, what caused it? You've listened to him."

"Your brother, Mr. Wyatt, is suffering from rather common causes which affect a good many people in today's world, and that is the root of it. The world and its emotions are moving too fast, far too fast for some of us, and he was one of those who could not keep his footing. He stumbled. It happens about us every day, I regret to say. Modern life is too involved, too complex and unyielding in its demands, for some men to handle with ease. They simply fail under the load — it is a retreat from a life they cannot or do not wish to cope with."

"Keep the lectures for the old folks, Doc. I'm asking about Harley."

"Harley is —" he broke off and frowned. "Precisely what are you seeking, Mr. Wyatt?"

"Things. Have you met my sister-in-law, Louise Wyatt?"

"No, I'm afraid I haven't. I've heard of her, of course."

I shot him a glance. "I'll say you've heard of her. Harley raves about her all the time. What about that?"

He was instantly ill at ease and sought to avoid an answer. Some of those mental reservations again.

"Well? What about it?"

"Eh . . . I believe he does mention the woman."

"You bet he does — have you listened to him?"

"Naturally I attempt to understand my —"

I broke in. "Have you listened to him?"

"Yes. Yes I have."

"Sounds screwy, doesn't it?"

"Which is why he is under our care, Mr. Wyatt."

"Yeah," I said. "Anybody who carries on like that is asking to be locked up. Where does he get those ideas — about a woman who changes her shape to look like somebody else?"

The doctor stared at me and wondered just how much he could say. I guessed his mind, made an impatient gesture.

He said slowly, "Frankly, Mr. Wyatt, your brother's troubles seem to arise from an . . . ah, fixation upon the person of your sister-in-law. I have reason to believe his mental unbalance came about when he possibly . . . ah, declared his love for her and she spurned him, of course. He perhaps accompanied his declaration of affections with some desperate plan for the two of them to run away someplace. Naturally, it never occurred to him that she would refuse, but when she did he was so overwrought he lost possession of his faculties."

"Boiling that down, you mean he blew his top when she laughed at him."

"That is correct."

"And then what?"

"In a given situation such as this we may expect one of two subsequent possibilities. The patient either continues to love the object of his affection by mentally refusing her declination, or he approaches a natural opposite and dislikes her violently. This latter, I may add, happens rather often in everyday life but the spurned lover seldom comes to our attention because he is able to assimilate the load, either by recourse to liquor, physical exertion or simply forgetting the woman.

"Only occasionally are they brought to us; more often they find themselves in jail for assault upon the body of the woman, or their more successful rival."

"Harley was really nuts about Louise?"

"Yes, I believe so."

"And now, I suppose, he hates her guts?"

"Yes. In his mind's desire to seek revenge upon her he is mentally casting her into all sorts of unflattering moulds and evil guises, wishing upon her

every imaginable kind of ugly form — a snake perhaps, or a lizard, a rat, or some other predatory animal or reptile."

I let that soak in and again wondered what was on Jimmy's mind. In some of our recent kitchen conversations he had been a mile away from me.

"I take it that you don't pay much attention to his ravings — about Louise being a different woman?"

"Of course not. We —" The doctor broke off to stare at me. "You have put that rather oddly, Mr. Wyatt."

I took the report from the Phoenix detective out of my pocket and handed it over to him.

"Read this, Doc. If I told you what I meant by that crack, you'd try to lock me up too."

He skimmed through it, smiling.

"This seems to concern your brother James, and his wife."

"Yeah. It concerns her, mostly. There's an accurate description in there of the woman when she lived in Phoenix. Too bad you haven't met her here, in Chicago."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because she looks like this now —" and I gave him a full picture description of Louise as she appeared now. By this time he had read the Phoenix descriptions.

"A different woman, obviously," he said, still smiling.

Finally I told him what she was like in San Diego. He shook his head.

"I dislike to insert myself into family affairs, Mr. Wyatt, but apparently your brother has been living with three separate women, each of whom posed as his wife and used the same name. It's done, of course."

"Of course. But I see you don't connect this up with Harley's ravings?"

He glanced at me rather sharply. "Of course not!"

"No," I echoed with open sarcasm, "of course not. Did you ever hear of a case of a woman changing her shape — form?"

He was now smiling broadly.

"I believe I see your objective quite clearly, sir. Yes, I've heard of such things — in mythology. Let me see . . . there are witch-women who may change their shape at will; there are were-wolves and were-tigers, that is, half human and half tiger who may assume the guise of a beguiling woman; oh, there are any number of fantastic creatures in mythology who use a

human form to gain some immediate goal or mislead some poor man. I should point out, however, that that is mythology."

"Harley's pretty far gone on that one idea," I said. "Maybe he's been reading the fantasy books."

The doctor thought I was serious. "It is possible, yes. A great deal of mythology is taught children, fairy tales and that sort of thing. Some modern fiction employs it as a base. *Dracula* is a case in point. And many magazines today cater to the adult who hasn't fully left the fairy tale behind him. Something of that sort may have given your brother the idea of casting the woman into different moulds."

"How about the chance," I asked softly, "of Harley actually having seen something? Something different?"

The doctor pin-pointed me. "Oh, not a chance! Superstitions belong to the old world, to Europe and Africa." He was watching me closely. I could guess his thoughts.

"And India maybe," I agreed, "or Burma."

"India is teeming with superstition."

I got up — this guy was a blank wall. "Sorry to take up so much of your time, Doc. I guess that's that. The stuff got on my mind and I had to talk to somebody about it. I had to see if there was anything behind Harley's raving."

"Just be careful, Mr. Wyatt, that it doesn't weigh too heavily on your mind. Our population out there is always increasing." He pointed to the detective's report. "By the way, did by chance your brother Harley read this document?"

"Thinking maybe *that* sent him off? No, I picked this up a couple of months ago, didn't get started on it until he was locked up and started talking about a different woman. Ties in, don't it Doc?"

"I don't leave nothing to chance, I can't afford to. And listen, as a matter of curiosity, supposing these witch-women could change their shape from one woman to another, supposing *one* of them was a brunette in San Diego and a little redheaded squirt in Phoenix and still something else in Chicago? Supposing all these women were the same woman, just changing around to please her husband — you know, give him a taste of everything? How could you tell which woman was the real one?"

"What?"

"Which one of those three is the real McCoy, with the others just window dummies?"

That one sent him off into a spasm of laughter.

When he quieted again, he said, "It isn't a question of discovering the true woman, Mr. Wyatt. I'm afraid you weren't listening closely. The problem there, if such a problem existed, would be to discover the true *form* from which the woman sprang. She would not be a woman at base."

"Oh? No?"

"No. At base she would be an animal, reptile or bird. She would be a woman when the object of her intentions, a man, first saw her. Afterwards, depending upon whether or not the man discovered part or all of her secret, she might assume the forms of various other women to please him. In the twinkling of an eye she could become the image of almost any woman on earth that he desired."

"All dames in the body of one, eh?"

"All women in the body of something," he corrected me. "You would never discover which woman-shape was the basic one because *none* were. The pretty face of the fairy tale is but a snarling beast beneath — a tiger, a crocodile."

Or, I thought to myself after I left the doctor, a monkey, or a rattlesnake, or a cockroach, or an ant eater, or a wolf, or the rat I always heard gnawing in the walls. Jimmy's wife had a lot of funny little tricks you'd never find in the outside world. Jimmy said so.

He had also told me he was head over heels in love with her, meaning all three of her I guess.

I could put a man in the house with a camera, using infra-red film and flash bulbs for night work. Neither of them would see the flash and take alarm but she might hear the noise of the shutter and I wouldn't get my picture. I'd not only lose the picture, I'd lose Jimmy — he'd know.

In the end I decided to risk it myself.

A midnight fire next door to the downtown bookstore cleared the way; someone telephoned and the lights went on in their bedroom. Scarcely five minutes later Jimmy came running out of the house half dressed, half awake. He whipped the car out of the garage, backed to the street, and with a farewell toot on the horn vanished with a roar of exhaust.

I waited behind the garage a full half hour before letting myself in the kitchen door, to pad across the room in stocking feet. The lights in the bedroom had long ago been turned off and the house was quiet. I hoped I had given her time to go back to sleep, to relax her vigilance now that he was gone. And I found myself wondering why she had always avoided me.

Harley had been welcome at the house and Jimmy had taken her to visit the family often enough. But she had refused to see me, to let me see her. Jimmy's vague excuses about my past, my present, weren't entirely acceptable. She was afraid of me for some other reason, for some strong reason. She might fear me because I wasn't weak, like Harley; or moonstruck, like her husband; or fawning, like the family. She might fear me because I could see through the body she was wearing.

I stopped just outside the bedroom door and listened. No sound. Carefully, avoiding the noise of scuffling, I put my shoes back on and then eased the snout of my gun around the doorframe, pointing at where I judged the bed to be. There was no movement from within.

I waited a few seconds and followed the gun with my eyes.

They had become used to the semi-darkness of the house, and I saw the room distinctly in the little light seeping in from the street. The bed was over by the windows and it had not been slept in. Startled, I looked around the room for Louise and saw no sign of her.

Without thinking, I stepped in the bedroom and flicked the wall switch.

There was a swift, frightened movement from the far side of the room and something ran across the floor, seeking the safety of darkness under the bed. I jumped for it, ran between it and the bed, and as it sought to dodge around me, stepped on it.

It never occurred to me to use the gun still in my hand. My first instinct had been to step on it, to smash out its life, and I had done so. I scraped the sole of my shoe clean on a rug and snapped off the bedroom light.

I went back to the kitchen. In the darkness I pulled a chair around facing the door and sat down with the gun in my hand, waiting for Jimmy to come home.

Their bed had not been slept in — neither of them used it.



So great was Daniel Defoe's skill at making fact seem as alluring as fiction and fiction as convincing as fact, that we frankly have no idea whether the pamphlet anecdote here reprinted is based on fact or stems from Mr. Defoe's ever-plausible imagination. In either case we recommend it as a fine specimen of dry humor, and for its disclosure of the fascinating profession of "stroker of bewitched persons."

The Friendly Demon

by DANIEL DEFOE

A GENTLEMAN in Ireland, near to the Earl of Orrery's house, sending his butler one afternoon to a neighboring village to buy cards, as he passed a field, espied a company in the middle thereof, sitting round a table, with several dishes of good cheer before them. And moving towards them, they all rose and saluted him, desiring him to sit down and take part with them. But one of them whispered these words in his ear, "Do nothing this company invites you to." Whereupon, he refusing to accept of their kindness, the table and all the dainties it was furnished with immediately vanished, but the company fell to dancing and playing upon divers musical instruments.

The butler was a second time solicited to partake of their diversions, but would not be prevailed upon to engage himself with them. Upon which they left off their merrymaking and fell to work, still pressing the butler to make one among them, but to no purpose. So that, upon his third refusal, they all vanished and left the butler alone, who in a great consternation returned home without the cards, fell into a fit as he entered the house, but soon recovering his senses, related to his master all that had passed.

The following night, one of the ghostly company came to his bedside and told him that if he offered to stir out the next day, he would be carried away. Upon this advice, he kept within till towards the evening, and, having occasion to make water, ventured to set one foot over the threshold of the

door in order to ease himself, which he had no sooner done but a rope was cast about his middle, in the sight of several standers-by, and the poor man was hurried from the porch with unaccountable swiftness, followed by many persons.

But they were not nimble enough to overtake him, till a horseman, well mounted, happening to meet him upon the road, and seeing many followers in pursuit of a man hurried along in a rope without anybody to force him, caught hold of the cord and stopped him in his career; but received, for his pains, such a strap upon his back with one end of the rope as almost felled him from his horse. However, being a good Christian, he was too strong for the devil, and recovered the butler out of the spirits' clutches, and brought him back to his friends.

The Lord Orrery, hearing of the strange passages, for his further satisfaction of the truth thereof, sent for the butler, with leave of his master, to come and continue some days and nights at his house, which, in obedience to his lordship, the servant did accordingly. Who after his first night's bedding there, reported to the earl in the morning that his specter had again been with him and assured him that on that very day he should be spirited away, in spite of all the measures that could possibly be taken to prevent it. Upon which he was conducted into a large room, with a considerable number of holy persons to defend him from the assaults of Satan, among whom was the famous stroker of bewitched persons, Mr. Greatrix, who lived in the neighborhood, and knew, as may be presumed, how to deal with the devil as well as anybody. Besides, several eminent quality were present in the house; among the rest, two bishops, all waiting the wonderful event of this unaccountable prodigy.

Till part of the afternoon was spent, the time slid away in nothing but peace and quietness, but at length the enchanted patient was perceived to rise from the floor without any visible assistance, whereupon Mr. Greatrix and another lusty man clapped their arms over his shoulders and endeavored to weigh him down with their utmost strength, but to no purpose. For the devil proved too powerful and, after a hard struggle on both sides, made them quit their hold; and snatching the butler from them, carried him over their heads and tossed him in the air, to and fro like a dog in a blanket, several of the company running under the poor wretch to save him from the ground. By which means, when the spirits' frolic was over, they could

not find that in all this hurry scurry the frightened butler had received the least damage, but was left in statu quo upon the same premises, to prove the devil a liar.

The goblins, for this bout, having given over their pastime and left their May-game to take a little repose, that he might in some measure be refreshed against their next sally, my lord ordered the same night two of his servants to lie with him, for fear some devil or other should come and catch him napping. Notwithstanding which, the butler told his lordship the next morning that the spirit had again been with him in the likeness of a quack doctor, and held in his right hand a wooden dish full of grey liquor, like a mess of porridge, at the sight of which he endeavored to awake his bedfellows.

But the specter told him his attempts were fruitless, for that his companions were enchanted into a deep sleep, advising him not to be frightened, for he came as friend and was the same spirit that cautioned him in the field against complying with the company he there met, when he was going for the cards; adding that if he had not refused to come into their measures he had been forever miserable; also wondered he had escaped the day before, because he knew there was so powerful a combination against him; that for the future there would be no more attempts of the like nature; further telling the poor trembling butler that he knew he was sadly troubled with two sorts of fits; and therefore as a friend he had brought him a medicine that would cure him of both, beseeching him to take it.

But the poor patient, who had been scurvily used by these sort of doctors, and fearing the devil might be at the bottom of the cup, would not be prevailed upon to swallow the dose, which made the spirit angry; who told him, however, he had a kindness for him, and that if he would bruise the roots of plantain without the leaves and drink the juice thereof, it should certainly cure him of one sort of his fits; but as a punishment for his obstinacy in refusing the liquor, he should carry the other with him to his grave.

Then the spiritual doctor asked his patient if he knew him. The butler answered no. "I am," says he, "the wandering ghost of your old acquaintance John Hobby, who has been dead and buried these seven years; and ever since, for the wickedness of my life, have been lifted into the company of those evil spirits you beheld in the fields, am hurried up and down in

this restless condition, and doomed to continue in the same wretched state till the day of judgment" — adding that "had you served your Creator in the days of your youth, and offered up your prayers that morning before you were sent for the cards, you had not been treated by the spirits that tormented you with so much rigor and severity."

After the butler had reported these marvelous passages to my lord and his family, the two bishops that were present, among other quality, were thereupon consulted, whether or no it was proper for the butler to follow the spirit's advice in taking the plantain juice for the cure of his fits, and whether he had done well or ill in refusing the liquid dose which the specter would have given him. The question at first seemed to be a kind of moot point, but after some struggle in the debate, their resolution was that the butler had acted through the whole affair like a good Christian, for that it was highly sinful to follow the devil's advice in anything, and that no man should do evil that good might come of it.

So that, in short, the poor butler after his fatigue had no amends for his trouble, but was denied, by the bishops, the seeming benefit that the spirit intended him.



STATEMENT OF THE OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION REQUIRED BY
THE ACT OF CONGRESS OF AUGUST 24, 1912, AS AMENDED BY THE ACTS OF
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Recommended Reading

by THE EDITORS

MANY anthologists and magazine editors, and even some readers, make quite a serious to-do about drawing a precise line between science fiction and the rest of imaginative literature. As you know, we've never felt the tremendous importance of the distinction; and only in this review department have we tried to draw any line of demarcation between science fiction and fantasy.

But if the line is to be drawn, we feel strongly that it should come at a different point than the usual one. Extrapolation of probable science, as practised notably by Heinlein and by a few other authors such as de Camp and Simak, can be legitimately called *science* fiction; space-warps, galactic drives, BEMs and time machines are as purely fantasy as werewolves or vampires.

An example in point is one of the most attractive novels yet to appear in this spate of science fiction publishing, Theodore Sturgeon's *THE DREAMING JEWELS* (Greenberg). Published as the first in a series of novels under the promising editorship of Ken Crossen, it makes not the faintest attempt at scientific plausibility, but simply evolves a new fantasy mythology of its own in the entrancing concept of living jewel-like creatures who can create living matter — and from this premise proceeds to build a warm and beautifully human story of a carnival, a lovely midget, and a boy who ate ants . . . and could regenerate his lost fingers. Science, no; but fresh, creative imaginative literature, strongly yes!

SCIENCE FICTION SHORT STORIES

Oddly, the only book of science fiction short stories to show up in the past two months also happens to be the most important volume of such to come along for many a moon. This is Robert A. Heinlein's collection, *THE MAN WHO SOLD THE MOON* (Shasta). The Heinlein following will find such

beloved favorites as *The Roads Must Roll*, *Blow-ups Happen* and *Requiem*. New to us all is the title story, wherein Mr. Heinlein is at his superlative best in portraying exactly what might happen if "robber-baron" capitalism, unrestrained by common decency — let alone morals or conscience — is allowed an opportunity to exploit the moon. This, ladies and gentlemen, is a must!

SCIENCE FICTION ANTHOLOGIES

Best: THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES: 1950, edited by Everett F. Bleiler and T. E. Dikty (Fell). These editors continue the series started last year with a tasteful and representative survey of the field distinguished by a "sort of an introduction" by Vincent Starrett, which is, of course, among the best writing of any year! Groff Conklin's BIG BOOK OF SCIENCE FICTION (Crown), in achieving quantity, makes too many sacrifices of quality, but is still a bargain item for its inclusion of about ten absolute top-notchers.

FANTASY NOVELS

Best: Elizabeth Cadell's delightful BRIMSTONE IN THE GARDEN (Morrow) is a charming (if faintly snobbish) picture of a tiny English village subjected to a summer's haunting by two soul-catching demons and a wistful ghost. These are really demons of good-will who manage, with just a touch of mild malice, to solve everyone's problems and bring about a generally happy ending. Robert Coates's HERE TODAY (Macmillan) is an exasperating novel of current English life and time travel. The fantasy is weak and confused; the non-fantasy is, while undisciplined, profoundly moving.

FANTASY SHORT STORIES

Best: The American publication (by Knopf, bless 'em!) of Nigel Kneale's TOMATO CAIN. Kneale is a young Manxman who can write a chilling and individual ghost story. Especially recommended for bedside reading is his story of a fourteen-year-old ghost, that of the camp-follower, Peg. A new edition of Algernon Blackwood's time-tested stories, TALES OF THE UNCANNY AND SUPERNATURAL, has been published by The British Book Centre. There's nothing new in the book (Arkham House published the last new Blackwood in 1946), but it's a collection that belongs on your shelves.

NON-FICTION

Best: Eileen J. Garrett's *THE SENSE AND NONSENSE OF PROPHECY* (Creative Age). In a year marked by singularly irresponsible publishing in the para-scientific fields, Mrs. Garrett's bitterly witty sketch of the borderlines of extrasensory perception and what she calls "the supernormal" stands out for its solid rationality. Convinced by her own experience of the existence of supernormal phenomena, she insists on sensible scientific evaluation of evidence, deftly strikes at the phonies exploiting the field, and adds interesting footnotes on the people and phenomena she has herself encountered.

REISSUES

Best: Eric Frank Russell's *SINISTER BARRIER* (Galaxy). The first cheap reissue of the classic fictional use of Charles Fort's "we're property" data — probably the best story Russell has written, and imperative for all who missed it earlier. *THE ESSENTIAL SAMUEL BUTLER* (Dutton) contains that wittiest of Utopias, *EREWON* (but not *EREWON REVISITED*), a long introduction by G. D. H. Cole, and multitudinous excerpts from one of the most stimulatingly imaginative minds of the nineteenth century. Hugo Gernsback's *RALPH 124C41+* (Fell) is strictly for the scholar and collector; unreadable as a novel, it still represents, as Fletcher Pratt's fine foreword points out, exceedingly early (1911) straightforward serious scientific extrapolation in fiction form.

**Note:**

If you enjoy *THE MAGAZINE OF FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION*, you will like some of the other *MERCURY PUBLICATIONS*:

ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY MAGAZINE

DETECTIVE: THE MAGAZINE OF TRUE CRIME CASES

MERCURY MYSTERY BOOKS

BESTSELLER MYSTERY BOOKS

JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY BOOKS

*It seemed to us more than pure coincidence that we received the manuscript of Graves Taylor's *The Roommate* at about the same time that Rutgers University Press published Leon Edel's incomparably fine edition of THE GHOSTLY TALES OF HENRY JAMES. For James (whose fantasies, aside from *The Turn of the Screw*, are little known and seriously underrated) represents a tradition in American supernatural writing apart from either the Gothic overstatement of Poe and Lovecraft or the naturalistic understatement of O'Brien and Bierce. The true Jamesian fantasy is one of psychological indirection, a story in which hinted-at supernatural forces serve to illuminate the crannies of the protagonist's mind. And it is in this tradition that Graves Taylor (long active in music and radio, but never before in short fiction) has conceived and admirably executed this haunting story.*

The Roommate

by GRAVES TAYLOR

July 22. . . . I do not like the way my old home has changed this past month. The *feel* of it has altered subtly, and I have slowly become aware of something portentous which does not declare itself. If only I could discover some actual evidence I am sure the matter would not so disquiet me, for I am an intelligent woman and know no fear of things which can be understood.

Most of all I dislike the fact that the intangible quality, whatever it may be, seems most remarkable in my own bedroom.

This change must be only coincidental with the employment of my new servants, as Lamb himself never enters my room and Dora does so only during the daylight hours to turn it out. And it is after dark that my room feels most wrong.

July 23. . . . I do not know that I shall be able to keep the Lamb couple. Dora is an efficient housekeeper and a fine cook, and her husband keeps busy in the garden, but they do seem so excessively married! I call the woman

'Dora' instead of the 'Mrs. Lamb' I feel sure she would prefer, and I have given them living quarters as far as possible from my own; yet I wonder how long I shall be able to endure the knowledge that under my roof —

Never since my early girlhood have these old walls seen marrying or giving in marriage, and they seem now to shrink outward in distaste.

The Lambs' physical attributes seem leagued against my peace of mind, for Dora is pretty and colorful, and Lamb himself is intense and casually handsome. Each of them has an almost embarrassing vitality. Dora has a strange trick of pretending not to notice Lamb; but I have learned to avoid being in the same room with them both whenever possible, because between them and about them there seems to quiver a tautness of mutual attraction which I find deeply disturbing — almost indecent.

Of course my natural delicacy turns all such thoughts from my mind, yet I often wish I could have found two old men such as served me previously, or two elderly women, who were willing to live in such isolation as my old home imposes.

Oddly enough, Lamb and Dora seem not to mind being hidden away here at the end of the road. One might almost think they had some craving for seclusion; but perhaps that may be put down to Lamb's queer shyness of strangers — I have noticed that Dora, not he, always answers the telephone and the doorbell.

Ah well, their little foibles do not concern me. Dora showed me the usual papers and letters when she arrived — some time before Lamb did. All is in order with the Lambs, but I am unable to forget that it is only since their arrival that the atmosphere of the house has changed in some way I cannot see, hear, or understand.

July 28. . . . The feeling continues and is beginning to vex me. Not that I suffer insomnia: it is rather that when I wake I wish I had not slept — yet I do not dream. I have almost come to believe that something untoward must happen in my room while I am lost in slumber. Yet when I defer sleep, and wait and watch, nothing occurs. Indeed, nothing could occur except by my own will and act, for not only is the entire house securely bolted by my own hand, but the door to my room is invariably locked at night.

Every morning I look carefully about, examining each of my things —

my enormous walnut four-poster, the locked door. Nothing is marked, or altered in any way. I go through the open doorway to my bathroom, searching — and finding nothing. I look out its one window, in the same wall as my bedroom windows — high, and immune from outside breaching. I go back and walk around the bed slowly. It looks as it has every morning since my sister's death. I examine my fine linen sheets, and the cases covering the two big pillows — one of them untouched and the other slightly crumpled by my use and presenting a warm-looking concavity where my head has lain. All looks as it should — yet something is wrong. Something outside the senses has happened in this room while I slept, something has occurred which I do not understand.

This room.

This quiet, lovely room which has known no flutter of change, no flurry of excitement, for twelve years.

Only twelve years, yet to me it seems in another life that this room pulsed to the emotional agonies of my sister. That last and most devastating of her fleeting engagements was no concern of mine, except through its effect on her. To be sure I had once fancied myself in love with Thomas, but my pride had taken care of that the instant he — on first sight of my sister — made his preference clear. His luminous dark eyes never left her, and all his songs — previously mine — were henceforward directed to her. He had a beautiful voice.

But my sister wanted only to play. It was with Thomas just as it had been when she was briefly engaged to Harvey: all her young men were a part of her play. I understood my sister. She had no realistic wish to share her future with the dark young Thomas. Rather, she must have found him basically repulsive, unlike the others: no matter how playful her gaiety was during an evening when Thomas had come to call, at night in her dreams she ran from his attentions — came screaming into my arms, imploring sanctuary. And it was in my arms that she always woke, sobbing, begging me not to leave her when again I slept.

So I sent Thomas away when she entreated me to do so, even though it meant a great rending in my own life — never to see him again. I could not have my sister distressed. And the last few years of her life were spent alone with me, in peace.

The present amorphous disturbance in this room must be leading my

mind into recapitulation of former distress. Twelve years of peace, and now — this. But now there is only myself to consider, and I will guard my peace.

August 1. . . . This is fast becoming insupportable. I wonder what would happen if I should take to sleeping in the day and remaining awake at night — all night, every night. . . .

Nonsense. I am a sane, strong-willed woman of thirty-six. I will not permit anything so notional as a *feeling* to affect the routine of my solitary and quite satisfactory life. Again this morning I found nothing physically amiss in my room. The lock on my door had not been tampered with. My bed showed that I had slept quietly as always: there was no disarrangement of the satin coverlet, and my indented pillow lay docilely beside the untouched one. Yet — the room feels quite wrong.

Later. . . . I have been perturbed all day, but now that evening is again here I am putting aside all profitless conjecture. Tomorrow when I wake with the sunlight flooding through my windows these extraordinary vapors will be dissipated and I shall know that all is well. I am determined on this.

August 2. . . . All is not well. My trivial preoccupation with a *feeling* has been pushed aside by a thing more tangible and immeasurably appalling. This day has been a horror growing in my soul — growing from that first early shock of discovery to this moment when I must again face the night.

Yet — the day began with beauty. When I woke there was a blessed absence of that wraith of the intangible which had unnerved and excited me every morning for many days. The pall, whatever it had been, unaccountably had lifted. I sat up in bed and smiled. My room felt — cosy! And, in myself, I knew a remarkable sense of vigor and well-being unfelt heretofore in my adult life.

With an exhilarated sense of release I glanced about, checking automatically the locked door, the arrangement of my clothing on the chaise-longue, the brilliantly white curtains' movement in a tender breeze. There was nothing — visible or invisible — in my room to torment me. My body felt newly alive. I stretched and groaned with pleasure, and reached for the dressing-gown I always place on that side of the bed which I do not use.

It was then that I saw it: the pillow beside mine was rumpled. The pillow

I had not used bore in it a head-sized concavity like the impression in my own, but slightly larger.

Today, with my own hand, I have added a sliding bolt to the lock on my door.

August 3. . . . It is there again, that outrageous invasion of my privacy, that unexplainable hollow in the unused pillow. And I am losing weight. This morning I sat before my mirror for a time, and it was there that I first noticed the shadowy hollows in my face, the transparency of my skin, the fragility of my temples, and the deepened brilliance of my eyes. There was even a slight flush in the skin now stretched over my cheekbones. And when I dressed I could no longer ignore the fact that my clothing has become too large for me. It is rather drab clothing, I notice.

My sister — the only one who ever shared a room with me — frequently teased me about my figure. She called me 'pleasingly plump' in a tone that managed to convey the word 'fat.' She and Harvey used to laugh at my awkwardness when we were children playing together. She was herself distressingly thin always. When she died, Harvey was just out of medical school and seemed to feel that the deliberate malice of Fate prevented him and his father from saving her. And Harvey has never married. He did not understand my sister: he never realized that she felt only an amused contempt for all males, and would never have married him. He idealized her — from earliest memory when his gaze went past my chubby form to rest on her flashing beauty. She was always graceful. Well, today if she were here to see she would certainly call me 'skinny.'

It is incredible that these marked changes have occurred in me within the space of a few short weeks; yet there is the evidence of my mirror and my measurements. I am forced by honesty to realize that I am becoming, for the first time in my life, beautiful. I find it pleasant but, at my age, unimportant. If this loss of weight continues I shall have to consult Harvey, lest I be ill.

And, as though this impossible impress in the pillow were not upsetting enough, there has now begun to be a disturbing change in the attitudes of Dora and Lamb toward me. Their demeanor remains flawless, yet I would swear that there is something new behind Lamb's dark eyes. Perhaps he has noticed my pallor and loss of weight. Is it concern for my health and well-being as his mistress? Or is it that this Something which seems to lurk

behind his eyes actually lurks only in my own imagination? I do not know.

Dora runs the house so well that I have very little contact with either of them, particularly with Lamb whose work is all exterior. But I have noticed that Dora never speaks to him in my presence; she appears to ignore his existence. She serves me well, but of late I have seen a new sullenness in her. Today I walked in the garden gathering herbs, and as I reached the thyme bed I glanced in through the laundry-room window. Dora was there, wearing a face I had never before seen — a face which I can only call malevolent. She was washing one of my grey dresses, and as I watched she slapped the soapy wet garment against the tub. Twice she did this, muttering to herself in a vindictive, low tone.

I crept away from the window unobserved — or so I thought: as I reached the corner of the house I saw Lamb watching me. He stepped off the walk silently to let me pass. His action was right and his expression proper; yet there was that behind his eyes which sent me indoors with a thudding pulse. What is it that I sense behind his eyes?

Later. . . . I must end this somehow. Twice I have seen the hollow in the pillow. Tonight for the first time in my life I will sleep on the chaise-longue.

August 6. . . . How absurd to think that I would sleep! During the past three nights I have lain on the chaise-longue, paced the floor, or curled up in the window-seat — but I did not sleep. I watched. I waited.

I am still watching and waiting. But, since I have not slept in my bed the hollow in the pillow has not recurred.

During the first two days I managed occasional short naps in the garden. These have served me for sleep, but today it has rained steadily, and I am reluctant to sleep indoors, even during the daylight hours.

In those two days I saw less of Dora and more of Lamb. While he and I shared my garden we did not speak to each other: he worked as though I were not there, although often when I looked his way I felt that he had just stopped watching me. It was an extraordinary impression — but then, everything about Lamb seems extraordinary. The flowers and shrubs are stunning this year — more brilliant than ever before. The texture of leaf and petal is infinitely finer and lovelier than I had ever noticed. Lamb seemed in high spirits: his gay whistling reached me, and his occasional

mented song accompanied my preoccupation. He has a very nice, rather haunting, voice.

Today, indoors, I have watched Dora going about her work. I had not noticed before that she works fitfully, as though she too is preoccupied. She was dusting the library in my presence this afternoon when Lamb came in and asked her quietly for something. He touched his black forelock to me respectfully, but he did not meet my eyes. It seemed to my observation that Dora ignored him utterly, seeming not to hear his remark to her. When she left the room, still without a glance at him, he went out behind her, beginning to sing softly as he passed through the doorway.

Plainly there is something amiss between those two, but I have not the leisure to concern myself with them. During the long evening my rational mind has faced the fact that I cannot go on this way. I shall be ill. I must find some way to restore my life to its balanced routine, despite the hollow in the pillow. Now that I have faced the matter squarely, I see that it presents no real problem: it can only be that I was both times imagining the strange condition of the unused pillow. And that in the shock induced by my fancy, I punched and pounded it to 'restore' its normal shape, without leaving time for an adequate check on the actuality of what I thought I saw.

Tonight I shall again sleep in my bed, and the morning will show how erroneous my notion was, and how unnecessary my subsequent days of torment. In order to ensure a deep and quiet sleep I shall take a sleeping pill — one that remains from an old prescription Harvey gave my sister.

Later. . . . I have taken the sleeping pill, and am now curled in my deep window-seat waiting for the first drowsiness to reach me. My room feels tense. The moonlight etches a distorted view of the garden. A moment ago I saw something move there, and knew a flash of alarm until I realized that it must be only Lamb. He appeared to be on his way to the village. Perhaps this, if he makes a habit of it, accounts for Dora's moodiness and the impression she gives of being unaware of his existence.

The garden is quiet now, and my eyelids are heavy. I shall sleep well, and when morning comes I will find the unused pillow beside mine — unused.

August 7. . . . I woke feeling refreshed, gay, and somehow young; but my pleasure was brief. It is yet early morning, and my hope is that the

smooth flow of my pen in the quiet prose of my upbringing will induce some touch of reasonableness into this day. For the pillow is again impressed — just as I saw it twice before except that this time the hollow is a bit off-center, a little *nearer to mine*.

As I sit here fighting for calmness I wonder about the mechanics of hallucination. Is it possible for one to see things that do not exist even while suspecting one's self of doing just that? Would not the suspicion prevent the hallucination?

My pulse has become quieter, I feel no acute panic — yet I still see in the pillow I do not use the physical impossibility of a concavity. My eyes tell me that the pillow has cushioned a head. And my hands, exploring, confirm my vision. Can two senses be thus similarly deceived? I need help in this. Perhaps. . . . no. I could not possibly confide in Dora, nor risk her acuteness. I must put it to rights before I admit her. Somehow I do not mind touching the pillow: I rather enjoy handling it.

Later. . . . Perhaps the strangest thing about all this is that in spite of my terrifying ignorance of hallucination, and even though I am living in such bizarre circumstances, yet I find myself well and strong. My eyes are clear, and my color is better than ever before in my life. And what *is* that melody I have twice today heard myself humming? It must be one of Lamb's.

This afternoon I became acutely bored with my repetitive grey dresses, and on impulse telephoned my dressmaker and ordered half-a-dozen bright new dresses, no two alike, and all gay. At last I convinced her that I was really I, and she agreed to deliver the first of them next week. But I must call her again: I had forgotten how startlingly my measurements have changed.

Meanwhile I have gone through some old trunks in the attic and discovered some things of my sister's — all bright, or lacy, or otherwise charming. None of them is grey. I have pressed and put on a foulard of crimson and pink — a daring color combination which I find becomes me very well.

All this is quite unlike me: my problem seems to have given me new vitality — a paradox beyond my power to resolve.

The problem, however, I must resolve. I have decided to send for Harvey. His ascetic approach to life and his professional excellence make him always welcome here. Ever since he and my sister and I were children together, in the days when his father was our family physician, Harvey has looked at

me as though I were not there. This total lack of interest in me as a person will maintain in our interview exactly the detached, laboratory atmosphere I now need. I shall devise some pretext for asking him to make a professional call tomorrow. I'll ask him to come rather early in the morning, and will receive him in my bedroom, *before* I have touched the pillow.

Tomorrow the eye of science will, unknown to itself, rectify the evidence of my own untrustworthy senses. I must have proof.

August 8. . . . Harvey has come and gone. And his visit has put me in such a whirl that I hope to regain my aplomb by the detailed setting-down of this astonishing morning.

My awakening was delightful past all words. I was aglow with a feeling of inner richness, of physical and spiritual warmth greater than I knew life could offer. Even the sight of the incredible, newly-made impress in an unused pillow did not distress me beyond bearing — even though today it was still more off-center, still nearer to my own.

After I'd put on my sister's crimson dress and done my hair in a fashion the foulard seems to indicate, I examined the pillow's hollow more closely. It was impossible that a thing so patent had no reality. But I did not touch it this morning, because I wanted to make sure that the test by Harvey's senses would be precise.

I was standing at the window savoring my aliveness when I heard Dora's knock and her voice: 'Doctor Farlan to see you, Miss.'

When I unbolted and opened wide the door, she was disappearing down the stairs, and Harvey stood before me — sturdy and reliable and impersonal and welcome, his hair showing iron-grey in the light from my room. I said, 'Good morning, Harvey,' to his non-committal brown eyes, and bade him enter. He did so in his usual offhand manner. I closed the door behind him and turned, with the light full on me, just in time to catch his black bag teetering on the edge of a chair. He was staring at me. His face showed the utmost in astonishment — almost awe. I walked past him to a window, and turned. What in the world could be the matter with stolid, unchanging Harvey! Still he gazed at me, wordless.

After a long moment he crossed the room swiftly, gripped my shoulders painfully, and looked into my eyes. 'To think I never knew!' he said, and shook me a little. Then he let me go so abruptly that I staggered.

His words were cryptic. His behavior was remarkable. Harvey, for once, was not being scientific. My glow of warmth and abundance, which I'd expected his coming to quench, surged in me anew. I was between stupefaction and an impulse to laugh for unaccountable joy.

He looked slowly about the room, and when his eyes came back to mine they were quieter, but unlike the eyes of the Harvey I had known for thirty years. Suddenly the difference came home to me: he was not looking past me, not through me, but *at* me. At me as a person.

Some emanation of excitement reached me and met its like within me; together they set me to trembling. I steadied myself by sitting in the window-seat.

Harvey said, 'You're not ill. You couldn't look like this and be ill.' He shook his head as though puzzled, and laughed shortly. 'You're so changed that I'm tempted to say you must have been ill all your life — until now.'

My breath was short, but I managed to meet his strange mood with an expression of my own. I smiled. 'You've never really seen me before,' I reminded him.

'Rather, I've never seen the real you before,' he countered. 'You've kept yourself locked away all these years. Now you seem a real person!'

'I feel quite a different person, Harvey. But I don't understand why, or in what way.' A sudden thought stopped me: always before when Harvey had called professionally, the necessity of admitting him to my bedroom had caused me such acute embarrassment as to aggravate my trivial indispositions. But this time it hadn't occurred to me to mind. Why not? All I said was: 'Of course I am still I, no matter how strange I seem. I couldn't really *be* different, Harvey!'

He grinned at me. 'No? Why, even your room's different! It's always been so austere and barren. What've you done to it, to give it this — this warmth?'

'It hasn't been redecorated, Harvey.' I spoke as flatly as I could, but in my heart I knew what he meant.

He shook his head. 'Something's been changed,' he insisted. 'Colors — something.' Then his gaze came back to me with urgency. 'And you — you! All these years through which I've seen you, and yet not seen you . . . all the years! Then he made an impatient movement with his whole body and came swiftly to me, saying: 'We can't waste any more years. We've wasted

too many.' And he took me into his arms and spoke against my hair. 'My dear — it was you all these years and I didn't know. What a stupid fool.'

As I leaned against him, trembling, there rushed through my mind a kaleidoscope of proper retorts, of reactions that I knew should be mine, built as they were throughout a lifetime. But none of them passed the borders of my mind: they shrank and shriveled there. I felt them gather into a tight small knot of terror and dissolve under the urgency of his hands and his voice. My trembling increased. A flooding warmth went through me and devoured every vestige of lonely chill that was left in my spirit; yet my body shook terribly.

He carried me to the chaise-longue, covered me with the afghan there, and then went to the bed for a pillow. I'd forgotten the hollow in the pillow — the test of science — until he said, 'I see you use both pillows now-a-days. Or perhaps you have a roommate!' He chuckled at his own jest, and followed tenderly with his hand the mysterious off-center impress. Then he snatched up both pillows and brought them to me.

While he tucked me in, words poured from him — gay, breathless plans which I scarcely heard. Once he interrupted himself with rueful horror to ask, 'Darling, you will, won't you? I mean — your response — I mean —'

I nodded. I couldn't speak just then: I was too busy being alive and bewildered.

Once he wandered to the window and said, 'You'd like for us to live here, wouldn't you? I'm sick of my place in the village, and this is near enough for my work — there's always the telephone. How'd it be to have the entrance to my surgery come through the garden? By the way, I'll bring old Ferguson out with me — your garden's in bad shape.'

This startled me into speech. 'But Harvey, it couldn't be! I've had a man working in it every day for weeks!'

He looked down into it again, and shrugged. 'Well, it looks as if it hadn't been touched for months. However, Ferguson'll have it restored in no time. And you may as well fire your gardener, my dear. I'm afraid he's no good.'

I pushed off the afghan and went to the window. The garden lay below in its cradle of sunlight, but it lay sleeping. Shrubs and flowers were profuse, but they were untended; the borders were a tangle of weeds, and the gravel paths needed attention. What had Lamb been doing all those long days when he was pretending to work? And *why hadn't I noticed!*

I faced Harvey squarely. I asked my question directly.

'Harvey, do you think I could be mad?'

He looked at me, stunned, for a moment, and then he laughed outrageously. He took me in his arms again, still chuckling. He vibrated with suppressed laughter, but he spoke tenderly. 'Don't you realize that you've quite possibly been a little mad all your life, until now? That you've actually just come to life, my dear, after all these years? Mad?' He waved at the window. 'Because you didn't notice the garden was going to seed?' He rocked me in his arms. 'No, darling, you're not mad.'

So then I told him about the pillow.

He listened carefully until I finished: 'And it was there, that hollow, wasn't it, Harvey? You saw it yourself. You touched it! It was really there?'

He held both my hands and looked steadily into my eyes. 'Yes, it was really there,' he answered. 'But I won't have you thinking you're insane. The truth would be better for you. My dear, you've undoubtedly been making that imprint yourself. You've just been walking in your sleep again.'

'Walking in — ? Again?'

'Yes, darling. You always have, from time to time. Your sister and I often talked about it, and I advised her not to tell you; it was better for you not to be worried about it. . . . So — now you do know.' He smiled. 'However, I don't believe your somnambulism has ever before taken the form of pillow-punching!'

Waves washed over me. To keep from drowning I clung to his hands, to his steady eyes. At last I managed: 'But why, Harvey? Why!'

He put his face against my hair and shook his head gently. 'It doesn't matter, my dear. I don't care. And you needn't.' He paused. 'It won't happen again, you know.'

I drew away so that I could see his eyes. 'It won't happen again?'

He shook his head. 'Never. There were reasons, darling, but they aren't important now. You've always had a strange life — first there was your sister, and since then you've been alone too much. Things sometimes happen when people are too much alone. Why, I've known people who got to imagining all sorts of things — sounds, sights, happenings — much more remarkable than just a bit of sleep-walking. Forget it.' Then he went on eagerly, 'And now, let's plan! How soon —'

So we talked about our future, and when he'd gone to make his rounds I stood looking long at the pillow which had so changed my life; and I knew that the next time morning sunlight revealed a hollow in it, that hollow would cradle Harvey's head.

August 14. . . . We'll be married next week. Ferguson has already done wonders with the garden, and Harvey sent a carpenter to remodel three downstairs rooms for professional use. I've been busy, as I've no servant now, but Harvey is bringing Ferguson's wife along tomorrow, and they'll live in. It was a shame I had to lose Dora. She left me the day Harvey and I found each other. I'd called her in to complain that the garden was a mess in spite of all the time her husband put in on it — and she stared at me blankly.

'Husband?' she said. 'I haven't got a husband.'

I thought she'd lost her wits. 'Why, I mean Lamb, of course!' And I'm afraid I was impatient with her. 'Lamb, your husband, who came here with you!' I faltered: 'At least, I think that's when he came, or soon after.' I accused: 'He was supposed to keep the garden, and he hasn't done so.'

She began to back away from me, fear leaping from her eyes. 'Nobody came with me,' she said, and her voice began to rise. 'Nobody at all, Miss. And I'm fair worn out, this big empty house and all these weeks without a smidgin of help and you always acting like you had a staff of four! And I'll be leaving, Miss — I'll be leaving today!'

So Lamb — all this time, Lamb . . .

I understood nothing, but I knew that Dora was speaking the truth. I could not understand, but I had no fear. Harvey'd told me I'd be all right from now on. And now, I would have Harvey.

Dora was nearly out of the room by then, but she paused when I said I'd give her a month's wages to go on with, and wished her luck. I heard later that she cashed my check in the village before noon, and left at once in a hired car, looking back over her shoulder as she went. I'm sorry to have frightened Dora: she was a good girl.

All the same, I don't believe I shall ever tell Harvey about Lamb.



Science fiction deals, as you all know, with the probable but startling future projections of already known scientific data; but a few sciences are of so peculiar a nature that the currently known and established facts are quite unlikely and startling enough, even without future extrapolation. Writers in the field, too preoccupied with physics and astronomy, have almost entirely overlooked one of the oddest and most science-fictional of all branches of human learning: topology, the aspect of mathematics which deals, to quote an excellent article by Tucker and Bailey in "Scientific American," January, 1950, "with properties of position that are unaffected by changes in size or shape." If you have ever constructed a Moebius band (if you haven't, you are about to learn how), you know something of the terror of controlling a scientific process which your mind refuses to accept as possible. We extend our deep gratitude to Martin Gardner for producing, in "Esquire" for January, 1947, the long-needed fictional treatment of topology — and at the same time writing an exceedingly funny story.

No-Sided Professor

by MARTIN GARDNER

DOLORES — a tall, black-haired stripteaser at Chicago's Purple Hat Club — stood in the center of the dance floor and began the slow gyrations of her Cleopatra number, accompanied by soft Egyptian music from the Purple Hatters. The room was dark except for a shaft of emerald light that played over her filmy Egyptian costume and smooth, voluptuous limbs.

A veil draped about her head and shoulders was the first to be removed. Dolores was in the act of letting it drift gracefully to the floor when suddenly a sound like the firing of a shotgun came from somewhere above and the nude body of a large man dropped head first from the ceiling. He caught the veil in mid-air with his chin and pinned it to the floor with a dull thump.

Pandemonium reigned.

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Jake Bowers, the master of ceremonies, yelled for lights and tried to keep back the crowd. The club's manager, who had been standing by the orchestra watching the floor show, threw a tablecloth over the crumpled figure and rolled it over on its back.

The man was breathing heavily, apparently knocked unconscious by the blow on his chin, but otherwise unharmed. He was well over fifty, with a short, neatly trimmed red beard and mustache, and a completely bald head. He was built like a professional wrestler.

With considerable difficulty three waiters succeeded in transporting him to the manager's private office in the back, leaving a roomful of bewildered, near-hysterical men and women gazing at the ceiling and each other, and arguing heatedly about the angle and manner of the man's fall. The only hypothesis with even a slight suggestion of sanity was that he had been tossed high into the air from somewhere on the side of the dance floor. But no one saw the tossing. The police were called.

Meanwhile, in the back office the bearded man recovered consciousness. He insisted that he was Dr. Stanislaw Slapenarski, professor of mathematics at the University of Warsaw, and at present a visiting lecturer at the University of Chicago.

Before continuing this curious narrative, I must pause to confess that I was not an eyewitness of the episode just described, having based my account on interviews with the master of ceremonies and several waiters. However, I did participate in a chain of remarkable events which culminated in the professor's unprecedented appearance.

These events began several hours earlier when members of the Moebius Society gathered for their annual banquet in one of the private dining rooms on the second floor of the Purple Hat Club. The Moebius Society is a small, obscure Chicago organization of mathematicians working in the field of topology, one of the youngest and most mysterious of the newer branches of transformation mathematics. To make clear what happened during the evening, it will be necessary at this point to give a brief description of the subject matter of topology.

Topology is difficult to define in non-technical terms. One way to put it is to say that topology studies the mathematical properties of an object which remain constant regardless of how the object is distorted.

Picture in your mind a doughnut made of soft pliable rubber that can be

twisted and stretched as far as you like in any direction. No matter how much this rubber doughnut is distorted (or "transformed" as mathematicians prefer to say), certain properties of the doughnut will remain unchanged. For example, it will always retain a hole. In topology the doughnut shape is called a "torus." A soda straw is merely an elongated torus, so — from a topological point of view — a doughnut and soda straw are identical figures.

Topology is completely disinterested in quantitative measurements. It is concerned only with basic properties of shape which are unchanged throughout the most radical distortions possible without breaking off pieces of the object and sticking them on again at other spots. If this breaking off were permitted, an object of a given structure could be transformed into an object of any other type of structure, and all original properties would be lost. If the reader will reflect a moment he will soon realize that topology studies the most primitive and fundamental mathematical properties that an object can possess.¹

A sample problem in topology may be helpful. Imagine a torus (doughnut) surface made of thin rubber like an inner tube. Now imagine a small hole in the side of this torus. Is it possible to turn the torus inside out through this hole, as you might turn a balloon inside out? This is not an easy problem to solve in the imagination.

Although many mathematicians of the eighteenth century wrestled with isolated topological problems, one of the first systematic works in the field was done by August Ferdinand Moebius, a German astronomer who taught at the University of Leipzig during the first half of the last century. Until the time of Moebius it was believed that any surface, such as a piece of paper, had two sides. It was the German astronomer who made the disconcerting discovery that if you take a strip of paper, give it a single half-twist, then paste the ends together, the result is a "unilateral" surface — a surface with only *one* side!

1. *The reader who is interested in obtaining a clearer picture of this new mathematics will find excellent articles on topology in the Encyclopaedia Britannica (Fourteenth Edition) under Analysis Situs; and under Analysis Situs in the Encyclopaedia Americana. There also are readable chapters on elementary topology in two recent books — Mathematics and the Imagination by Kasner and Newman, and What is Mathematics? by Courant and Robbins. Slapenarski's published work has not yet been translated from the Polish.*

If you will trouble to make such a strip (known to topologists as the "Moebius surface") and examine it carefully, you will soon discover that the strip actually does consist of only one continuous side and of one continuous edge.

It is hard to believe at first that such a strip can exist, but there it is — a visible, tangible thing that can be constructed in a moment. And it has the indisputable property of one-sidedness, a property it cannot lose no matter how much it is stretched or how it is distorted.²

But back to the story. As an instructor in mathematics at the University of Chicago, with a doctor's thesis in topology to my credit, I had little difficulty in securing admittance into the Moebius Society. Our membership was small — only twenty-six men, most of them Chicago topologists but a few from universities in neighboring towns.

We held regular monthly meetings, rather academic in character, and once a year on November 17 (the anniversary of Moebius' birth) we arranged a banquet at which an outstanding topologist was brought to the city to act as a guest speaker.

The banquet always had its less serious aspects, usually in the form of special entertainment. But this year our funds were low and we decided to hold the celebration at the Purple Hat where the cost of the dinner would not be too great and where we could enjoy the floor show after the lecture. We were fortunate in having been able to obtain as our guest the distinguished Professor Slapenarski, universally acknowledged as the world's leading topologist and one of the greatest mathematical minds of the century.

Dr. Slapenarski had been in the city several weeks giving a series of lectures at the University of Chicago on the topological aspects of Einstein's theory of space. As a result of my contacts with him at the university, we became good friends and I had been asked to introduce him at the dinner.

2. *The Moebius strip has many terrifying properties. For example, if you cut the strip in half lengthwise, cutting down the center all the way around, the result is not two strips, as might be expected, but one single large strip. But if you begin cutting a third of the way from the side, cutting twice around the strip, the result is one large and one small strip, interlocked. The smaller strip can then be cut in half to yield a single large strip, still interlocked with the other large strip. These weird properties are the basis of an old magic trick with cloth, known to the conjuring profession as the "Afghan bands."*

We rode to the Purple Hat together in a taxi, and on the way I begged him to give me some inkling of the content of his address. But he only smiled inscrutably and told me, in his thick Polish accent, to wait and see. He had announced his topic as "The No-Sided Surface" — a topic which had aroused such speculation among our members that Dr. Robert Simpson of the University of Wisconsin wrote he was coming to the dinner, the first meeting that he had attended in over a year.³

Dr. Simpson is the outstanding authority on topology in the Middle West and the author of several important papers on topology and nuclear physics in which he vigorously attacks several of Slapenarski's major axioms.

The Polish professor and I arrived a little late. After introducing him to Simpson, then to our other members, we took our seats at the table and I called Slapenarski's attention to our tradition of brightening the banquet with little topological touches. For instance, our napkin rings were silver-plated Moebius strips. Doughnuts were provided with the coffee, and the coffee itself was contained in specially designed cups made in the shape of "Klein's bottle."⁴

After the meal we were served Ballantine's ale, because of the curious trade-mark,⁵ and pretzels in the shapes of the two basic "trefoil" knots.⁶ Slapenarski was much amused by these details and even made several suggestions for additional topological curiosities, but the suggestions are too complex to explain here.

After my brief introduction, the Polish doctor stood up, acknowledged

3. Dr. Simpson later confided to me that he had attended the dinner not to hear Slapenarski but to see Dolores.

4. Named after Felix Klein, a brilliant German mathematician, Klein's bottle is a completely closed surface, like the surface of a globe, but without inside or outside. It is a unilateral surface like a Moebius strip, but unlike the strip it has no edges. It can be bisected in such a way that each half becomes a Moebius surface. It will hold a liquid. Nothing frightful happens to the liquid.

5. This trade-mark is a topological manifold of great interest. Although the three rings are interlocked, no two rings are interlocked. In other words, if any one of the rings is removed, the other two rings are completely free of each other. Yet the three together cannot be separated.

6. The trefoil knot is the simplest form of knot that can be tied in a closed curve. It exists in two forms, one a mirror image of the other. Although the two forms are topologically identical, it is impossible to transform one into the other by distortion, an upsetting fact that has caused topologists considerable embarrassment. The study of the properties of knots forms an important branch of topology, though very little is understood as yet about even the simplest knots.

the applause with a smile, and cleared his throat. The room instantly became silent. The reader is already familiar with the professor's appearance — his portly frame, reddish beard, and polished pate — but it should be added that there was something in the expression of his face that suggested that he had matters of considerable import to disclose to us.

It would be impossible to give with any fullness the substance of Slapenarski's brilliant, highly technical address. But the gist of it was this. Ten years ago, he said, he had been impressed by a statement of Moebius, in one of his lesser known treatises, that there was no theoretical reason why a surface could not lose *both* its sides — to become, in other words, a "non-lateral" surface.

Of course, the professor explained, such a surface was impossible to imagine, but so is the square root of minus one or the hypercube of fourth-dimensional geometry. That a concept is inconceivable has long ago been recognized as no basis for denying either its validity or usefulness in mathematics and modern physics.

We must remember, he added, that even the one-sided surface is inconceivable to anyone who has not seen and handled a Moebius strip. And many persons, with well-developed mathematical imaginations, are unable to understand how such a strip can exist even when they have one in hand.

I glanced at Dr. Simpson and thought I detected a skeptical smile curving the corners of his mouth.

Slapenarski continued. For many years, he said, he had been engaged in a tireless quest for a no-sided surface. On the basis of analogy with known types of surfaces he had been able to analyze many of the properties of the no-sided surface, and finally one day — and he paused here for dramatic emphasis, sweeping his bright little eyes across the motionless faces of his listeners — he had actually succeeded in constructing a no-sided surface.

His words were like an electric impulse that transmitted itself around the table. Everyone gave a sudden start and shifted his position and looked at his neighbor with raised eyebrows. I noticed that Simpson was shaking his head vigorously. When the speaker walked to the end of the room where a blackboard had been placed, Simpson bent his head and whispered to the man on his left, "It's sheer nonsense. Either Slappy has gone completely mad or he's playing a deliberate prank on all of us."

I think it had occurred to the others also that the lecture was a hoax

because I noticed several were smiling to themselves while the professor chalked some elaborate diagrams on the blackboard.

After a somewhat involved discussion of the diagrams (which I was wholly unable to follow) the professor announced that he would conclude his lecture by constructing one of the simpler forms of the no-sided surface. By now we were all grinning at each other. Dr. Simpson's face had more of a smirk than a grin.

Slapenarski produced from his coat pocket a sheet of pale blue paper, a small pair of scissors, and a tube of paste. He cut the paper into a figure that had a striking resemblance, I thought, to a paper doll. There were five projecting strips or appendages that resembled a head and four limbs. Then he folded and pasted the sheet carefully. It was an intricate procedure. Strips went over and under each other in an odd fashion until finally only two ends projected. Dr. Slapenarski then applied a dab of paste to one of these ends.

"Gentlemen," he said, holding up the twisted blue construction and turning it about for all to see, "you are about to witness the first public demonstration of the Slapenarski surface."

So saying, he pressed one of the projecting ends against the other.

There was a loud pop, like the bursting of a light bulb, and the paper figure vanished in his hands!

For a moment we were too stunned to move, then with one accord we broke into laughter and applause.

We were convinced, of course, that we were the victims of an elaborate joke. But it had been beautifully executed. I assumed, as did the others, that we had witnessed an ingenious chemical trick with paper—paper treated so it could be ignited by friction or some similar method and caused to explode without leaving an ash.

But I noticed that the professor seemed disconcerted by the laughter, and his face was beginning to turn the color of his beard. He smiled in an embarrassed way and sat down. The applause subsided slowly.

Falling in with the preposterous mood of the evening we all clustered around him and congratulated him warmly on his remarkable discovery. Then the man in charge of arrangements reminded us that a table had been reserved below so those interested in remaining could enjoy some drinks and see the floor show.

The room gradually cleared of everyone except Slapenarski, Simpson, and myself. The two famous topologists were standing in front of the blackboard. Simpson was smiling and gesturing toward one of the diagrams.

"The fallacy in your proof was beautifully concealed, Doctor," he said. "I wonder if any of the others caught it."

The Polish mathematician was not amused.

"There is no fallacy in my proof," he said impatiently.

"Oh come, now, Doctor," Simpson said. "Of course there's a fallacy." Still smiling, he touched a corner of the diagram with his thumb. "These lines can't possibly intersect within the manifold. The intersection is somewhere out here." He waved his hand off to the right.

Slapenarski's face was growing red again.

"I tell you there is no fallacy," he repeated, his voice rising. Then slowly, speaking his words carefully and explosively, he went over the proof once more, rapping the blackboard at intervals with his knuckles.

Simpson listened gravely, and at one point interrupted with an objection. The objection was answered. A moment later he raised a second objection. The second objection was answered. I stood aside without saying anything. The discussion was too far above my head.

Then they began to raise their voices. I have already spoken of Simpson's long-standing controversy with Slapenarski over several basic topological axioms. Some of these axioms were now being brought into the argument.

"But I tell you the transformation is *not* bicontinuous and therefore the two sets cannot be homeomorphic," Simpson shouted.

The veins on the Polish mathematician's temples were standing out in sharp relief. "Then suppose you explain to me why my manifold vanished," he yelled back.

"It was nothing but a cheap conjuring trick," snorted Simpson. "I don't know how it worked and I don't care, but it certainly wasn't because the manifold became nonlateral."

"Oh it wasn't, wasn't it?" Slapenarski said between his teeth. Before I had a chance to intervene he had sent his huge fist crashing into the jaw of Dr. Simpson. The Wisconsin professor groaned and dropped to the floor. Slapenarski turned and glared at me wildly.

"Get back, young man," he said. As he outweighed me by at least one hundred pounds, I got back.

Then I watched in horror what was taking place. With insane fury still flaming on his face, Slapenarski had knelt beside the limp body and was twisting the arms and legs into fantastic knots. He was, in fact, folding the Wisconsin topologist as he had folded his piece of paper! Suddenly there was a small explosion, like the backfire of a car, and under the Polish mathematician's hands lay the collapsed clothing of Dr. Simpson.

Simpson had become a nonlateral surface.

Slapenarski stood up, breathing with difficulty and holding in his hands a tweed coat with vest, shirt, and underwear top inside. He opened his hands and let the garments fall on top of the clothing on the floor. Great drops of perspiration rolled down his face. He muttered in Polish.

I recovered enough presence of mind to move to the entrance of the room, and lock the door. When I spoke my voice sounded weak. "Can he . . . be brought back?"

"I do not know, I do not know," Slapenarski wailed. "I have only begun the study of these surfaces — only just begun. I have no way of knowing where he is. Undoubtedly it is one of the higher dimensions, probably one of the odd-numbered ones. God knows which one."

Then he grabbed me suddenly by my coat lapels and shook me so violently that a bridge on my upper teeth came loose. "I must go to him," he said. "It is the least I can do — the very least."

He sat down on the floor and began interweaving arms and legs.

"Do not stand there like an idiot!" he yelled. "Here — some assistance."

I adjusted my bridge, then helped him twist his right arm under his left leg and back around his head until he was able to grip his right ear. Then his left arm had to be twisted in a somewhat similar fashion. "Over, not under," he shouted. It was with difficulty that I was able to force his left hand close enough to his face so he could grasp his nose.

There was another explosive noise, much louder than the sound made by Simpson, and a sudden blast of cold wind across my face. When I opened my eyes I saw the second heap of crumpled clothing on the floor.

While I was staring stupidly at the two piles of clothing there was a muffled sort of "pfft" sound behind me. I turned and saw Simpson standing near the wall, naked and shivering. His face was white. Then his knees buckled and he sank to the floor.

I stumbled to the door, unlocked it, and started down the stairway after

a strong drink — for myself. I became conscious of a violent hubbub. Slapenarski had, a few moments earlier, completed his sensational dive.

In a back room below I found the other members of the Moebius Society and various officials of the Purple Hat Club in noisy, incoherent debate. Slapenarski was sitting in a chair with a tablecloth wrapped around him and holding a handkerchief filled with ice cubes against the side of his jaw.

"Simpson is back," I said. "He fainted but I think he's okay."

"Thank heavens," Slapenarski mumbled.

The officials and patrons of the Purple Hat never understood, of course, what happened that wild night, and our attempts to explain made matters worse. The police arrived, adding to the confusion.

We finally got the two professors dressed and on their feet, and made an escape by promising to return the following day with our lawyers. The manager seemed to think the club had been the victim of an outlandish plot, and threatened to sue for damages against what he called the club's "refined reputation." As it turned out, the incident proved to be magnificent word-of-mouth advertising and eventually the club dropped the case. The papers heard the story, of course, but promptly dismissed it as a publicity stunt cooked up by Phanstiehl, the Purple Hat's press agent.

Simpson was unhurt, but Slapenarski's jaw had been broken. I took him to Billings Hospital, near the university, and in his hospital room late that night he told me what he thought had happened. Apparently Simpson had entered a higher dimension (very likely the fifth) on level ground.

When he recovered consciousness he unhooked himself and immediately reappeared as a normal three-dimensional torus with outside and inside surfaces. But Slapenarski had worse luck. He had landed on some sort of slope. There was nothing to see — only a grey, undifferentiated fog on all sides — but he had the distinct sensation of rolling down a hill.

He tried to keep a grip on his nose but was unable to maintain it. His right hand slipped free before he reached the bottom of the incline. As a result, he unfolded himself and tumbled back into three-dimensional space and the middle of Dolores' Egyptian routine.

At any rate that was the way Slapenarski had it figured out.

He was several weeks in the hospital, refusing to see anyone until the day of his release when I accompanied him to the Union Station. He caught a train to New York and I never saw him again. He died a few months later

of a heart attack in Warsaw. At present Dr. Simpson is in correspondence with his widow in an attempt to obtain his notes on nonlateral surfaces.

Whether these notes will or will not be intelligible to American topologists (assuming we can obtain them) remains to be seen. We have made numerous experiments with folded paper, but so far have produced only commonplace bilateral and unilateral surfaces. Although it was I who helped Slapenarski fold himself, the excitement of the moment apparently erased the details from my mind.

But I shall never forget one remark the great topologist made to me the night of his accident, just before I left him at the hospital.

"It was fortunate," he said, "that both Simpson and I released our right hand before the left."

"Why?" I asked.

Slapenarski shuddered.

"We would have been inside out," he said.

The Kraken

Below the thunders of the upper deep;
Far far beneath in the abysmal sea,
His ancient, dreamless, uninvaded sleep
The Kraken sleepeth: faintest sunlights flee
About his shadowy sides: above him swell
Huge sponges of millennial growth and height
And far away into the sickly light,
From many a wondrous grot and secret cell
Unnumbered and enormous polypi
Winnow with giant fins the slumbering green.
There hath he lain for ages and will lie
Battening upon huge seaworms in his sleep,
Until the latter fire shall heat the deep;
Then once by men and angels to be seen,
In roaring he shall rise and on the surface die.

ALFRED TENNYSON

The experimental biologist who overreaches himself belongs to the oldest traditions of science fiction, the documentary diary form to the oldest traditions of English fiction itself. Now see how a fresh approach can combine them into something completely new.

Barney

by WILL STANTON

August 30th. We are alone on the island now, Barney and I. It was something of a jolt to have to sack Tayloe after all these years, but I had no alternative. The petty vandalisms I could have forgiven, but when he tried to poison Barney out of simple malice, he was standing in the way of scientific progress. That I cannot condone.

I can only believe the attempt was made while under the influence of alcohol, it was so clumsy. The poison container was overturned and a trail of powder led to Barney's dish. Tayloe's defense was of the flimsiest. He denied it. Who else then?

September 2nd. I am taking a calmer view of the Tayloe affair. The monastic life here must have become too much for him. That, and the abandonment of his precious guinea pigs. He insisted to the last that they were better suited than Barney to my experiments. They were more his speed, I'm afraid. He was an earnest and willing worker, but something of a clod, poor fellow.

At last I have complete freedom to carry on my work without the mute reproaches of Tayloe. I can only ascribe his violent antagonism toward Barney to jealousy. And now that he has gone, how much happier Barney appears to be! I have given him complete run of the place, and what sport it is to observe how his newly awakened intellectual curiosity carries him about. After only two weeks of glutamic acid treatments, he has become interested in my library, dragging the books from the shelves, and going over

them page by page. I am certain he knows there is some knowledge to be gained from them had he but the key.

September 8th. For the past two days I have had to keep Barney confined and how he hates it. I am afraid that when my experiments are completed I shall have to do away with Barney. Ridiculous as it may sound there is still the possibility that he might be able to communicate his intelligence to others of his kind. However small the chance may be, the risk is too great to ignore. Fortunately there is, in the basement, a vault built with the idea of keeping vermin out and it will serve equally well to keep Barney in.

September 9th. Apparently I have spoken too soon. This morning I let him out to frisk around a bit before commencing a new series of tests. After a quick survey of the room he returned to his cage, sprang up on the door handle, removed the key with his teeth, and before I could stop him, he was out the window. By the time I reached the yard I spied him on the coping of the well, and I arrived on the spot only in time to hear the key splash into the water below.

I own I am somewhat embarrassed. It is the only key. The door is locked. Some valuable papers are in separate compartments inside the vault. Fortunately, although the well is over forty feet deep, there are only a few feet of water in the bottom, so the retrieving of the key does not present an insurmountable obstacle. But I must admit Barney has won the first round.

September 10th. I have had a rather shaking experience, and once more in a minor clash with Barney I have come off second best. In this instance I will admit he played the hero's rôle and may even have saved my life.

In order to facilitate my descent into the well I knotted a length of three-quarter inch rope at one foot intervals to make a rude ladder. I reached the bottom easily enough, but after only a few minutes of groping for the key, my flashlight gave out and I returned to the surface. A few feet from the top I heard excited squeaks from Barney, and upon obtaining ground level I observed that the rope was almost completely severed. Apparently it had chafed against the edge of the masonry and the little fellow perceiving my plight had been doing his utmost to warn me.

I have now replaced that section of rope, and arranged some old sacking

beneath it to prevent a recurrence of the accident. I have replenished the batteries in my flashlight and am now prepared for the final descent. These few moments I have taken off to give myself a breathing spell and to bring my journal up to date. Perhaps I should fix myself a sandwich as I may be down there longer than seems likely at the moment.

September 11th. Poor Barney is dead an soon I shell be the same. He was a wonderful ratt and life without him is knot worth livving. If anybody reeds this please do not disturb anything on the island but leeve it like it is as a shryn to Barney, espechilly the old well. Do not look for my body as I will caste myself into the see. You mite bring a couple of young ratts an leeve them as a living memorial to Barney. Females — no males. I sprayned my wrist is why this is written so bad. This is my laste will. Do what I say an don't come back or disturb anything after you bring the young ratts like I said. Just females.

Goodby



Fearsome Fable

AFTER they put the fifteen apes in front of the typewriters there was a long wait. The animals sat and looked at the machines, at the paper on the rollers. There was a long pause, then each ape, one after the other, leaned forward and typed a single, different word.

The experimenter waited a long, long time. But after the one flurry of activity, nothing happened. Finally, seeing that the apes had no intention of continuing, he went towards the typewriters.

The first ape had typed, NOW; the second had typed, IS; the third one, THE; the fourth, TIME; the fifth, FOR; the sixth ape, ALL; the seventh, GOOD; the eighth one, PARTIES; the ninth, TO; the tenth, COME; the eleventh, TO; the twelfth ape, THE; the thirteenth, AID; the fourteenth, OF; and the last ape had typed, MAN.

BRUCE ELLIOTT

F. Tennyson Jesse, author of many admirable novels and of some of the most acutely perceptive of modern studies in true crime, has also produced one volume of detective short stories of singular interest to the reader of fantasy: THE SOLANGE STORIES (Macmillan, 1931). For Solange Fontaine, like Miss Jesse herself, possesses what we today might call extra-sensory perception, and what her creator described as "an extra spiritual sense that warns her of evil." In the collected volume, this sense aids (and sometimes frustrates) her in the elucidation of crimes; but here we bring you, thanks to that omniscient discoverer of lost stories, Ellery Queen, an adventure of Solange which is in no sense a detective story: the moving narrative of a railway carriage, a commonplace little man with a black bag . . . and three lives that literally hung on Solange's extra sense.

The Railway Carriage

by F. TENNYSON JESSE

SOLANGE FONTAINE nearly missed the train that Monday morning. She had been staying at Merchester for the week-end, with that old Colonel Evelyn, whose son she had been the means of saving from the gallows, and the old gentleman had kept on talking, with the pathetic garrulity of age, till the cab-driver had warned her that there was a bare five minutes to get to the station. Luckily, Solange had only a small suitcase, and she ran across the platform to the nearest carriage, wrenched open the door, and jumped in as the cabman flung the case in after her.

At first, Solange, like anyone who has ever just caught a train at the last moment, leaned back, breathed thankfully, and took no notice of her surroundings. Then, also like everyone else, she looked round with a little smile of self-congratulation on her lips, ready to share with any strangers present that fraction of intimacy which such a happening strikes, like a spark, from one's fellow men.

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It was a third-class carriage, with hard seats and varnished wooden doors. Its only other occupant was a woman who was sitting in the far corner. Apparently she had noticed neither Solange's abrupt entry nor her smile. She was an elderly woman, dressed in shabby black, she had no luggage, and she was sitting with her hands — the knotted veiny hands of a working woman — folded together in her lap. She was staring out of the window, and her lips were moving a little, as though she were talking to herself soundlessly.

Solange's smile died a natural death; she looked at herself in the little mirror from her handbag to make sure her hurry had not disturbed the set of her plain little helmet-hat. All was well; she was her usual clear, fine-drawn self, save for an unwonted flush on her pale cheeks, and one loose feather of fair hair that lay against her temple. She tucked it back and put the mirror in her bag again. Her cigarette-case caught her eye as she did so; she took it out, then hesitated, and glanced at the silent woman.

"Do you mind if I smoke?" asked Solange.

The woman drew her eyes away from their blind staring as though by a physical wrench, and looked at her. Something in that gaze struck unpleasantly on Solange's senses, but, as the woman did not seem to have understood her, she repeated her question.

"Eh? Oh, naow. It don't make no matter."

The woman had a slight Cockney accent, but a surprisingly soft voice for one of her hard, almost wooden appearance. Solange thanked her and took out a cigarette, only to discover that she had no matches and that, as usual, her lighter wouldn't work. She glanced again at the woman, who had reverted to her occupation of staring out of the window. No good asking her for a light. She would just have to wait till someone else got in; the train was due to stop at the junction in another couple of minutes.

The platform was crowded, for it was market day at a neighbouring town, and it seemed that every farmer in the countryside was going in by this train. The carriage in which Solange was, however, being at the tail-end of the train, only one man came towards it and got in. He was a small, insignificant-looking man, with a big grey felt hat pulled right over his ears, and he carried a black bag.

He glanced sharply from Solange to the woman in black as he opened the carriage door and seemed satisfied by what he saw. Before he took his seat he stood for a moment, his bag in his hand, as though uncertain what to do

with it. He glanced up at the rack, and even made a movement towards it, then sat down opposite Solange and stowed the bag away between his feet, under the seat. The whistle blew, the guard waved his flag, and the train started off again through the hot, summer countryside.

Solange took out a cigarette and leaned towards him with a smile.

"Will you be so kind as to let me have a match?" she asked. The little man started. He, like the woman in black, seemed oddly abstracted. He stared at her, and then repeated: "A match? Oh, yes." He also had an accent, but it was a North-country one, Solange noted. He almost said: "A match? Oh, yez. . . ." Solange began to feel a little impatient. Was the world peopled by the half-dead this fine morning?

He brought out his matchbox pretty smartly, however, and struck a light for her. His gallantry might be a little clumsy, but his movements were noticeably deft and economical, so much so that Solange was struck by the contrast between his stubby fingers and their neat precision of action.

Her cigarette alight, she leaned back, and the little man relapsed into a sort of surly abstraction. The elderly woman continued to stare out of the window at the bleached fields and the dark trees, and the rhythmic movements of the haymakers. The train gathered speed and roared and rattled through the lovely domestic landscape, a landscape with no touch of savagery or wild beauty, but which held in its contented folds the pastoral activities of men for generations past.

It was a run of ten minutes to the next stop — the village before the market town — after which the train would suddenly become converted into an express and pursue its quickened and uninterrupted way to London.

To Solange, in spite of the lovely country, and of the inoffensiveness of her fellow-travellers, that ten minutes seemed like one of those curious spaces when time, as we know it, ceases, and an endless period, like a breath held beyond human endurance, is the only measure. Why this should be so, she could not have told. She only knew that she would have given a great deal to be out of that little third-class carriage, to be in a modern corridor train, to be — this, above all — away from her travelling companions. Inoffensive . . . ? Obviously . . . then what was wrong — and when had it begun!

The silent wooden woman had struck her with a sense of oddness, but not with any feeling of something definitely wrong. The commonplace little man, with his shaven cheeks and his deft, stubby fingers, had seemed un-

usual in a way that was not altogether good, but no message of evil such as had so often told her of harm, had knocked upon her senses when he entered the carriage. Yet it was only since he and the old woman had been in it together that she had felt this spiritual unease. Something was wrong between these two human beings — and yet they apparently did not know each other. Neither even knew that the other was in some queer way inimical, each was self-absorbed to the exclusion of the other, the woman in her strange daze of thought that was like a stupor, the man in some stony sort of regret. Sorry — that was the word for him, thought Solange, sorry but stubborn. He wasn't unhappy as the woman was unhappy, only ill at ease, as an animal is ill at ease when it is driven up the road to the slaughter-house.

Solange was glad when the train drew up at a little wayside station. This time their carriage was invaded by four or five men, for the front of the train was already full. Solange felt a curious sense of relief at this influx of other human beings. At least she would not be penned in with the two strange, lost people who had sat silently on the seat opposite her, one at each end, for the last ten minutes. There was only another quarter of an hour to go before the market town was reached, and then, doubtless, everybody would get out and she would have the carriage to herself for the rest of the run to London.

A big red-faced farmer, with side-whiskers, sat beside Solange, and pulled out his pipe, glanced at her, and saw she was smoking herself. She smiled at him, and he grinned back and proceeded to light up.

"That's good, Missis," he said. "I don't like to get the ladies' hair full of smoke, but it's hard luck on a man not to have his pipe."

A thin, dried-up man, who was sitting opposite to the farmer, nodded several times as he proceeded to pack his own pipe.

"That's so," he agreed. "I wonder if they let that poor young devil have a last smoke this morning."

"Sure they did," said the farmer, authoritatively, "they always let 'em do what they like. He could 'ave 'ad a bottle of champagne if he'd fancied it."

"No!" said the other man, in admiring disbelief. "Is that so?"

"That is so," asseverated the farmer.

"Well, now, I thought," said a third man, "that all they was allowed was an ordinary sort of breakfast — a good one, mind you, eggs and bacon, and anything like that."

"I heard they was given nothing but brandy in the way of a pick-me-up," said the thin man, rather encouraged by this contradiction of the farmer on the part of the third man.

"Anything they likes," repeated the farmer, stubbornly, "everyone knows that."

"Suppose they wanted poison, eh?" asked the thin man. "Something that would do it nice and quick without having to stand on the trap and have their necks broken. Don't tell me they'd give 'em poison."

The farmer was rather staggered by this novel suggestion. "Perhaps not poison," he said, "but champagne I don't doubt."

Solange guessed of what they must be speaking. There must have been an execution that morning. She refrained from saying that bromide and four ounces of brandy was the official assuagement for the last agony. The execution must have been at Merchester, and it was not remarkable that she heard nothing of it, for she had been staying with Colonel Evelyn, and such subjects were never mentioned in his house since that dreadful night, which might have been young Charles Evelyn's last. That was why the servants had watched the old Colonel so anxiously and why the local paper had not been forthcoming. . . . The Colonel had been very childish since his son's narrow escape, and it was easy to delude him in little practical matters.

"I don't believe," said a fourth man, of the black-coat class, perhaps some lawyer's clerk travelling to his work at the market town, "that they ought ever to have hanged him. It was a cruel shame, that's what it was. After all, it was only circumstantial evidence."

"That's as good as any other evidence, and better," said the farmer, stoutly; "the only other evidence is what folks tells you they've seen, and we have it on the authority of the Bible that all men are liars. Give me circumstances every time, I says, they can't lie nearly as well as a man can."

"And a man can't lie near as well as a woman," said the clerk, with a little snigger.

"That's true enough," said both the other men in chorus.

It suddenly struck Solange as odd that only the newcomers were talking. The little man with the black bag and the woman in the corner were still silent.

"Well," said the farmer, "I met young Jackson once or twice, and he seemed to me a decent young fellow enough, not the sort of chap you'd

ever expect to go and cut a man's throat behind his back, as you might say."

"He did it all right," said the clerk, "that's plain enough."

"They were both after the same woman, weren't they? And t'other man got her. You don't need to look much further than that. There's motive enough for you. Must ha' been fools."

"Come, now," said the farmer, "that's not very polite, with ladies present." He glanced at the silent woman in the corner, but she seemed to have heard nothing. She was no longer staring out of the window, her eyes were closed, and her hands were tightly folded together in her lap, and he looked away from her to Solange.

"I only came over from France on Friday," she said, "so I'm afraid I'm very ignorant. Has something — been happening?" She didn't like to say: "Has there been an execution?" so strongly were the memories of that dreadful morning in Merchester Jail implanted in her consciousness.

"Something happening!" said the farmer. "I should say so. Why, all Merchester has talked of nothing else for weeks and weeks. A young fellow called Jackson, Timothy Jackson, who served in Jordan's, the corn chandler's at Merchester, was walking out with a young woman who was already tokened a bit above her station — to a young lawyer. Smart fellow, young Ted Emery. My lawyer he was, at least his father's my lawyer," added the farmer, importantly, "and one night in a dark lane young Jackson has a row with him and cuts his throat. He was hanged this morning, young Jackson was, in Merchester Jail. People were pretty sorry round about. Tim Jackson was a good fellow, though he was a Londoner. Had to live in the country for his health. He was delicate-looking, white as a girl, but handsome enough if it hadn't been for one of them birthmarks on one cheek. Shaped like a bat's wing, it were, and my old missus allers said it fair gave her a turn to look at. But he was handsome, in spite of it, and this girl took a fancy to him. But he was no match for young Emery, who was one of those smart young fellows who think no end of themselves, and had a motor-bike and a sidecar to take his girl in and all that sort of thing. She was pretty bitter against Tim Jackson at the trial. If you ask me, she had only been amusing herself and would rather have got Emery than young Jackson. Now she's got neither, and serves her right, too."

"Aye, that's right enough," said the man opposite him.

Solange remembered having read something about the case in the Con-

tinental *Daily Mail* three weeks earlier. Only a short paragraph, for it had been an ordinary enough crime of jealousy. The judge had made some scathing remarks as to the method of the murder. It was "un-English" to cut a man's throat. It would have been more English, and consequently better, if he had killed his adversary with a blow of a club, or his fist. Jackson, being a rather weedy town-product, had been unable to do this essentially English thing, and had resorted, in a moment of passion, to a razor. There had been a struggle, he hadn't crept up to the other man from behind, but undoubtedly in the course of the struggle he had cut his throat from behind, getting his arm round his neck and pulling the heavier man back towards him.

"I hear he confessed," said the clerk, importantly; "they were saying that at our Merchester office this morning, so I was told. It's my day at Winborough, you know, but they rang me up and told me just before I left home."

The whole carriage, still with the exception of the little man with the black bag and the elderly woman, was agog at this piece of news.

"Confessed, did he?" said the farmer. "Oh well, that'll put everybody's mind at rest. It's something to know justice has been done."

"Justice?" said the man opposite, bitterly. "Do you call it right to hang a decent young fellow because a woman had been driving him crazy? And if it comes to that, I'm not so keen on this capital punishment business. What right have we got to take life, I should like to know? I can tell you this, I'd sooner meet a young fellow like Timothy Jackson than meet the man who hanged him. There's a fellow I shouldn't like to shake by the hand. That's a dirty trade."

"Dirty enough," agreed the farmer, soberly.

The rhythm of the train began to slacken. Winborough was reached, and the carriage was emptied, but Solange saw, with a little feeling of dismay, that her original companions were continuing with her to London. She suddenly felt she couldn't bear this strange atmosphere of which she was conscious as surrounding them, and she got up to see if she couldn't change her carriage, but she had left it till too late. For the fourth time since the brief half-hour when she had jumped into the carriage at Merchester, she heard the guard blow his whistle, and the rhythm of the train began to beat upon her senses once more. Now there was no getting away from her strange,

dumb companions for an hour and a half. She had to stay with them whether she would or no. It was really an outrage, she thought to herself, that such a thing as a non-corridor train should still exist. This wasn't even a very good train of the old-fashioned type. It ran very bumpily. Perhaps, thought Solange, all the rolling-stock on this line was very old. Then in a flash she realized that something had gone wrong. The train was bumping in a curious fashion, its rattle changed to a roar, a crashing sound broke through the rapidly accelerating conglomeration of other noises, and then the whole world seemed to go mad. The coach reared up, attacked the coach in front like a mad beast, rocked, lurched sideways, and at last came to a standstill, like a leaning tower, poised on its rear end. Solange and her two companions were spilled like rubbish from a shoot, against the door and windows at the bottom end, splintered glass all about them, and the black bag hit Solange full upon the temple.

Why did this voice persist in waking her up? She didn't want to wake up, she only wanted to stay in this dark world where she felt numb and sleepy. She tried hard not to listen to the voice, but it went on and on. *Wake up, wake up, wake up . . .* the words beat over and over upon her brain, would let her have no rest. Reluctantly at last she allowed her mind to pay attention. The voice sounded more clearly now, *Wake up, wake up, you must wake up*. The darkness of the world began to be shot with flashes and gleams of light even before she opened her eyes. *Wake up, wake up . . .*

She opened her eyes and slowly realized where she was and what had happened.

"You're all right," the voice went on, "but you must get out." The voice seemed to come from above her head, and rather surprised to find she could move, Solange looked up. She saw the head of a young man, dark against the blinding square of light made by the window of the carriage which was right up above her head. The young man looked down at her as though she were at the bottom of a well, and he were peering in over the rim. She stirred and felt herself cautiously. Yes . . . she was intact, she could waggle all her fingers and toes, her back was not broken, she could feel pain where a sharp angle of splintered coachwork stuck into one thigh. She looked about her, still dazed by the shock and her senses confused by the shouts and wails of terrified human beings that came to her ears. The elderly woman was either

unconscious or dead, she was lying crumpled up, her eyes shut, and a thin skein of blood, where a splinter of glass had caught her, lying across her face like a ravelling of red worsted. The commonplace little man was doubled up, his head sunk sideways on his shoulder, his eyes closed and his face very pale. His hat had been knocked off, and Solange saw with a shock of irrational surprise, that, save where it was grey at the sides, his hair was a bright red. It was one of those stupid and irrelevant details that strike the mind at such moments of stress.

Solange looked up. There was the face of the young man still peering in from the top of that strange well into which the railway carriage had become changed as though by magic.

"Can't you help us out?" she called.

He shook his head. She saw the dark weaving motion of it against the clear square blue of sky.

"You must wake him up," he called down to her. "Shake him, wake him up."

Solange managed to stagger to her feet, pushing aside bits of broken wood that hemmed her in. She looked doubtfully at the little man crumpled up at her feet. She hardly liked to shake him, and yet she couldn't climb up the tower that was the up-ended railway carriage without his help. She put her hand on to his shoulder and spoke urgently.

"Are you hurt? Oh, do try and do something. We've got to get out. We've got to get the old woman out. Wake up. Wake up," and she did actually begin to shake him, as one shakes someone who is having a bad dream. Slowly, the commonplace little light eyes opened and looked at her unintelligently. Then the man moaned a little, and put up one hand to his head.

"You're all right, you really are," said Solange, urgently. "Do see if you can climb up. There's someone up there who will help you if you only can." She glanced up and the young man above her met her gaze.

"Make him hurry up," he said, "there's a fire. Listen." And Solange, with a pang of pure fear that she never forgot, realized that the crackling sound which she had thought came entirely from breaking woodwork, was really made by the burning of the next coach, perhaps even by the burning of one end of the coach she was in.

"There was petrol in the van," said the young man, "and the guard was smoking."

The little red-haired man now began to feel himself all over, as Solange herself had done.

"I'm a'reet, Miss," he said, a little unsteadily, "I'll climb oop and hold down my hand to you."

He looked round him and saw the woman still lying crumpled up, unconscious, and a worried look came across his face. However, he wasted no words, and began laboriously by the aid of the splintered luggage rack to try and pull himself up to the gaping window above his head. Solange saw, to her disgust, that the young man had gone. She managed to climb on the wreck of the seat, and exerting all her force, gave the little man a leg-up. With a mighty effort he pulled himself through the jagged frame of glass above his head and levered himself out into the air. For one awful moment Solange thought that perhaps he, too, was going to desert her, but he wriggled himself round on the up-ended side of the carriage, and looking down at her, held a hand that was cut and bleeding down towards her.

"Get a grip o' that," he said.

"I can't," said Solange. "I can't leave the old woman. We must get her out somehow."

The head of the young man came back now, and she saw it behind the redhead's shoulder.

"You want a rope," said the young man, "make a rope fast round her. Oh, hurry up."

Solange looked frantically round the shattered compartment. There was not so much as a luggage strap round the little man's black bag, and none round her suitcase. "Can't you get a rope?" she called up to the little man, "ask someone for a rope."

Then the red-headed man spoke, slightly hesitating, in spite of that dreadful crackling that was coming nearer and nearer.

"Ma bag, Miss," he said, "ma bag. Tha'll find a rope there."

Solange seized the little black bag, and struggled with the lock.

"Don't pull it," called the little man, "slide it. That's reet."

The bag gaped open, and Solange saw a rather crumpled nightshirt and a shabby sponge bag.

"Look underneath," called down the little man.

She plunged in her hand and to her intense thankfulness her fingers met a good, strong rope, that filled up with its coils the whole of the bottom of

the bag, as a serpent might have done. She pulled it out. It was amazingly strong, smooth, and flexible. The next moment she saw that it had a running noose at one end that passed through a brass ring. Her mind became very clear and cold. She handled the thing without any distaste. She even thought how convenient the running noose would be.

"Be quick," urged the young man, who was still peering in behind the flaming red head of that apparently commonplace little man. "Get her out before she sees what it is."

Solange worked the noose down over the limp form of the elderly woman, pulled her arms through it so that they hung out helplessly on each side, and then flung the free end of the rope upwards. The little man with the red head caught hold of it, and began to pull. Solange heaved with all her strength upon the dead weight of the old lady. She was a very frail old lady, it appeared, now that Solange had her hands upon her, but she was heavy, nevertheless, with the weight of her unconsciousness.

"Be careful. Try not to cut her face any worse," Solange called up.

The little man seemed amazingly strong as well as deft with his hands. He groaned and sweated, but he pulled the woman up till her head and shoulders were through the window untouched by the jagged frame of glass. Then he clutched her under the arms and pulled her right through the opening.

"Wait a moment, lass," he called down to Solange. "I'll have thee out in a jiffy."

He disappeared, and Solange felt terrifyingly alone. The heat seemed suffocating, the crackling was nearer, and through the roar of escaping steam and the roar of the flames she could still hear faint thin cries from further down the train. She was never so thankful to see anyone in her life as she was to see the red head of the public executioner appear once more above her. He lowered the rope down to her, and she fitted it round her waist, and, taking a good purchase with her hands, kicked her way up the carriage and was in her turn pulled out into safety. The air was fresh and sweet, for the smoke was being blown away in the opposite direction, and for a moment Solange felt, as she stood swaying a little upon the grass at the side of the track, that it was good merely to be alive. Then she looked about her. The train was piled on itself in the most fantastic fashion. The engine lay upon its side. The accident had happened at a level crossing, and already there

were motor-cars going backwards and forwards, and people busy at work.

"I reckon they're all out now," said the little red-headed man, wiping his wet brow with the back of his hand. "Eh, that was a near thing, lass!"

It dawned on Solange that he was still holding one end of the rope, which was round her waist, as if she were a heifer being led to market, and she suddenly realized, emotionally, as well as with her mind, what it was that had saved her. She began to tear at it with her fingers, feeling as near to hysteria as she had ever felt in her calm, well-ordered life.

"I'll tak' it off, lass," said the little man, apologetically. "I was sorry about it. I didn't want you to see it, but there weren't no other way."

While he was talking he began to ease the rope from about her waist.

"That's why I didn't get in at Merchester. You see, with my red hair, I'm what you might call noticeable like. They drove me from t'jail t'next station."

He had got the rope off her by now, and was coiling it round his own waist, under his coat. "Government property nowadays," he explained as he did so. "I mun use this again next week."

"Did the young man help you?" asked Solange. "Was he helping you with us? It must have been dreadfully heavy work otherwise."

The little red-headed man stared at her.

"What young man?" he asked.

"The young man who looked in at the carriage window and woke me up. He told me to wake you up. The young man who told us we must have a rope."

"I'll get one o' they cars to take 'e home, lass," said the little red-headed man, with a rather worried expression on his face. "Tha'll be wanting a lay down."

"But did he?" persisted Solange.

"There weren't no young man that I ever saw or heard of, nowt but you waking me and telling me to get out and get rope. You saved my life, lass. I'd ha burned . . ." and he pointed to the railway carriage which was now a roaring furnace; the flames were pale almost to invisibility in the bright sunlight, but their heat reached Solange where she stood.

"Well, there was a young man," said Solange, wondering whether the red-head had been too confused to notice him, "and, what's more, it was the young man who woke me up. It was he saved the lot of us."

She looked about her, and saw the elderly woman lying in the grass some twenty yards away where the little man had dragged her. The young man was kneeling beside her, his head bent down to hers. The woman's eyes were open, and she was looking up into his face with a smile upon her own. She opened her mouth as though to speak but the young man very gently laid his fingers, long, delicate, over-white fingers, against her lips. A little crowd of people, among them two men bearing a stretcher, were approaching the woman. The young man bent a little lower over her, then raised his head and looked across at Solange. She could see his face clearly now in the bright sunlight, it was no longer shadowed as it had been when he was peering down into the railway carriage, and with a pang, half of incredulity, half of pure terror, she saw that he had a port-wine stain, shaped like a bat's wing, lying over one cheek beneath the eye. The stretcher-bearers and their assistants closed in about the woman and began to lift her. Solange ran towards them. She seemed to have lost the young man in the little crowd of people, but she motioned the stretcher-bearers to stay still for a moment, and thinking she might be some relation or friend, they did so.

"Did you see him?" asked Solange, bending over the woman. "Did you see him?"

The woman smiled at her. "I saw him," she said; "he must have escaped after all. You won't tell anyone, will you?"

"No, no," said Solange, "I won't tell anyone."

"He said it was all right," said the woman, feebly. "He said I should meet him this evening. He was always a good boy, was my Tim, though I knew he was marked for misfortune from the moment I first set eyes on that bat's wing on his poor face, but he was always good to his mother. 'Don't worry, mother,' he's just told me, 'it's all right. I'll see you this evening!'"

She closed her eyes and seemed to drift into unconsciousness.

"Where are you taking her?" asked Solange.

"Cottage Hospital, Miss," said one of the stretcher-bearers. "It isn't far. Just down the road," and they set off, carrying their burden carefully over the uneven ground.

The little red-headed man, who had stayed behind to fasten his coat completely over the rope, now came up to Solange.

"I wish I could get a hat," he complained. He was evidently worried about his conspicuous hair.

"I don't think anybody will notice," said Solange; "they've got other things to think about now, you see."

He jerked his red head towards the disappearing stretcher. "Who was t'owd lady?" he asked. "Did tha know her?"

"She was the mother of the young man who saved us," said Solange.

It was most unreasonable, she concluded later, that she had refused to share the offer of a car up to town with the little red-headed man. After all, he had, under instruction, saved her life, and there were souls evidently capable of resentment and crime but capable also of forgiveness. There was no reason why she shouldn't like to stay with the red-headed man whom Tim Jackson had saved from a death by fire. Nevertheless, Solange was glad to have seen the last of him, and glad also that Mrs. Jackson died that evening in the local hospital, without knowing what it was that had been passed over her head and fastened about her body.

In granting us permission to reprint this story, Miss Jesse wrote:

"The only crab to it is this: I thought it was such a good idea that, although knowing it was incorrect and that in England hangmen don't carry their ropes around with them in little over-night bags, I couldn't resist writing it. It is the only time I have ever committed the crime of being incorrect and I got a long letter from a barrister and one from a prison governor informing me that the rope is always kept in the prison where executions take place and is laid up in vaseline to keep it supple. So I wrote back very humbly and said I knew I had been wrong, but it was such a good idea that I was afraid I had been unable to resist it. I do hope you don't mind this lack of correctness."

If "the crime of being incorrect" could be regularly guaranteed to produce such results as this, we'd establish an editorial tabu against accuracy!



Time traveller Rolf 12, of 5050 A.D., set out to investigate the barbarian culture of the twentieth century. And, as any contemporary parent could have told him, his advanced learning was meagre equipment indeed for a discussion of wishes and money with five-year-old Louise! But, as radio scripter Murphy slyly implies, perhaps Rolf's accumulated data on our mores was not wholly inaccurate. "Out of the mouths of babes," you know. . . .

Time Tourist

by MAURICE MURPHY

CHRONOS are tricky things and time travel was still in its infancy in 5050 A.D. Rolf 12 could tell only within a decade or two where he would land. Still, he had wanted to study the barbaric twentieth century and he had prepared himself well for the journey three thousand years back in time.

He had even had "clothing" made, a covering made of sheep shearing which those savages wore instead of plasti-bodies. He couldn't suffocate his own body in that. But he did have a telellusion created, in spite of the expense. It was just as effective, especially with the new Tingle-Tactile tubes. The most difficult part, curiously enough, was the adjustment of the color contrast, completing the optical illusion of "clothing."

The plasti-body he had on was quite unlike those he usually wore, being modeled after an actor of that time. It had a different magnetic field than a human body naturally, since the synthetic neurological circuits were, after all, only biotronic.

He took a portable Chrono with him, the folding type, of course. Just as he would have needed a sword and a horse in an earlier time he knew he would need the weapons of the twentieth century, so he brought money and an atom bomb, a little one. Well prepared, he stepped into the Chrono.

Rolf 12 had done the best he could to re-create the costume of the period and felt justly proud of achieving a norm. Each item he wore was authenticated by a caption under the microfilm record: the blue serge coat and

white collar — Hoover; the silk butterfly adornment — Sinatra; the shiny red and yellow pants — USC; the hat — Opera, and the awkward shoes with straps around the ankle — the only way to walk in them seemed to be on his toes — ballet.

As he stepped out of the Chrono and tripped down the street, he created quite a stir. Rolf 12 gazed with interest at the drab and hectic surroundings, then at the people who stopped and stared. Some gaped, others gasped.

One woman fainted for a reason he could not determine. A child screamed. He listened idly to the mounting wail of a siren in the distance.

Then a moving vehicle passed. A trail of invisible fumes reached Rolf 12, poisoning his oxygen. Then another passed and another. The cloud of gas brought Rolf 12 to his knees. Fragments of history clung to his darkening mind: wars, air raids, underground shelters. Rallying himself, he dashed for the nearest opening in the ground, oblivious to the meaning of SUBWAY written above the entrance. Crowds of savages jostled and pushed toward the same entrance with hysterical haste.

Rolf 12 halted, a greater fear flooding his mind. He couldn't risk physical contact! If the biotronic field should touch a human's magnetic field . . . ! Rolf 12 unfolded his portable Chrono and stepped through it for an instant.

He counted on the fact that the Chrono did not completely compensate for the earth's revolution. He knew he would land in that time but in another spot. It would be temporary safety, at least, from this danger.

Louise put down her doll, Susie, and decided to prove Miss Agnew wrong. She closed her eyes tight and wished hard. Then she opened them, to witness the rematerialization of Rolf 12.

Vexed, Rolf 12 realized that the color contrast was ruined completely. All that remained was a translucent glow enveloping him.

"There! You see?" Louise said decisively.

Rolf 12 saw a young female of five or six and a green sward, evidently a park or garden. "See what?" he asked.

"Miss Agnew was wrong," Louise told him. "She said you couldn't get what you wanted by wishing for it."

"She was quite right," Rolf 12 affirmed, sententiously.

Louise smiled knowingly. "But I wished for a handsome prince — and you came true!"

"Oh, I understand," Rolf 12 said, smiling back at her. She was quite child-like, he thought, for all of being five years old. She should have been through conditioned adolescence at three and reached mental adulthood at four. But, perhaps in the twentieth century, these things took longer.

"That was just coincidence," he told her.

"What's coincidence?" she asked.

"That is the occurrence of something we desire, or at least expect, when, according to outward appearances . . ." Rolf 12 interrupted himself, frowning. "Perhaps I should say it is the junction of apparently unconnected, yet related, circumstances."

Louise looked at him a moment. "Like a wish coming true."

"Like it," Rolf 12 admitted. "But that is not all of it."

"Of course not," Louise added. "But if you wish hard, it'll come true."

"No."

"You did."

"Oh — that!" Rolf 12 looked at her again. Precocious, he thought. And she had a way of keeping to the point.

"Mental concentration will produce some amazing results, not all directly explicable," he told her. "You would just now be studying the relation of the mental and the physical, psychosomatic symptoms and so forth. And the relation between matter and energy, revealed by the equation $E=mc^2$."

"And 2 and 2 equals 4. I know that," Louise asserted.

"Well, after all, I know it's primary, but . . ." He was discomforted by the slightly superior expression on the face of the girl. He had better not talk down to her, he decided. "What I meant to explain was something that might be beyond your time. That is, the focus of cerebral waves on the energy flow in such a manner that it directly influences the substance of that energy flow, or matter. You see?"

"If you wish hard enough, it'll come true, won't it?"

Rolf 12 was impatient. "But that's like trying to explain chemistry in terms of sorcery. I see it's beyond your understanding. It doesn't matter."

"Mind over matter," Louise said suddenly.

Puns! Rolf 12 cringed. Yet he had to admit that she had expressed his idea in a pithy, if incomplete, way. And she had pinned him down, rather ignominiously. "You needn't try to show how clever you are," he snapped.

Louise retorted, "I'll bet you don't know what you're talking about."

That was a sore point with Rolf 12. "It is true that I may lack some technical knowledge," he conceded, with dignity. "But I certainly have as much as the average layman. After all, it's like trying to explain atomic fission to a savage who can make a fire only by rubbing two sticks together."

Louise looked at him and then asked, with apparent innocence, "Can you make a fire by rubbing two sticks together?"

"Now look here!" Rolf 12 checked himself with a sigh. He continued, calmly.

"Let me refer to an experiment conducted in your own time, with playing cards. With strict controls, I believe they found that the mental state of the subject had a direct influence on the fall of the cards. Now — have you ever done anything like that?"

Louise nodded. "With Daddy."

"What experiments have you and your father conducted?"

"Daddy says 'Pick a card' and I pick one. Then I think hard and he thinks hard and he tells me what the card is."

"No!" Rolf 12 was amazed. "Wait! That could be the result of telepathic communication. Can your father influence the way the cards fall?"

"He thinks he can, Mommy says."

"Really?" Rolf 12 looked at her with new respect. Perhaps they had been wrong about the twentieth century. Certainly this girl's conversation had been pertinent and assured; obviously a highly developed intelligence. One thing puzzled him. "What is this 'wishing'?"

Louise sighed. "Mommy says I might as well wish. She says that's the only way I'll get what I want."

"That's the way you get what you want in this time — by wishing?"

Louise nodded her head, sadly. "Sometimes."

"What a curious system!" Rolf 12 commented. "Don't you use money?"

"We don't. We don't have any," Louise answered. "Daddy says he can't pull money out of thin air."

Rolf 12 frowned, puzzled. "How does one get money, then?"

Louise was a little annoyed with his ignorance. "You buy tickets on the Sweepstakes, or you listen to the radio, and they give it away."

Rolf 12 was alarmed. "They give money away? Why?"

"Daddy says money is the root of all evil. We're always having trouble with money."

"Trouble? What does your father mean — root of all evil?"

"Daddy says too much money will be the death of you."

"Death?" Rolf 12 looked around nervously.

"Daddy says that nowadays money is only good for spreading germs, but Mommy says she could use some."

"She could?" Rolf 12 seized upon this possibility. If it was dangerous in this time and had no value except as a disease-carrier. . . .

"Oh, I wish!" Louise closed her eyes tight and clenched her fists.

Rolf 12 hadn't noticed. He was busy pulling banknotes out of the Chrono. He took a stray newspaper from the ground and started wrapping it up. He thrust the hastily-wrapped bundle into the little girl's arms.

"Please — if your mother can use it, take it — now!" he said nervously. Louise looked down at the green money, then at Rolf 12. With a glowing smile she stood on tip-toe and quickly gave him a kiss.

Louise saw a crackle of blue flame, an aura of flaming yellow and then Rolf 12 vanished before her eyes.

What happened was clear enough. When the little girl contacted Rolf 12, the human magnetic field short-circuited the biotronic field of the plastic body. The curious thing was that, even as he threw himself into the Chrono with only an instant to save his life, Rolf 12 felt a strange glow of pleasure because of the impulsive touch of the little girl's lips.

Rolf 12 was gone. Louise watched the translucent glow — the telellusion — slowly disappear. She smiled.

"I knew Miss Agnew was wrong!" she said.

A trying trip, Rolf 12 thought. But worth it, he reflected, when he considered what he had learned. How inaccurate could historians be! When he published his notes — "Inside the Twentieth Century" would be a good title — they would all sit up and take notice.

He looked down at the atom bomb. Another query: did it really belong in the 20th century — or earlier? As Rolf 12 remembered his history, fission was discovered some time after the bow and arrow, but only 8 or 9 centuries after gunpowder. Would people with such an involved economic system — and such a high order of intelligence — be content with something so simple, with such a primitive weapon? It was logical, he decided, to assign it to a less developed era. Its destructive range was so local, just a city or two.

The vast majority of science fiction stories concern themselves with science of the future. This develops from the rather narrow assumption that there was no science of past civilizations with which we of the present are not wholly conversant. Trevis Tarrant, an Egyptologist of authority as well as a noted amateur detective, takes sharp issue with this viewpoint; and one of his most striking detectival adventures is in itself a fine rebuttal of this contemporary complacency and a noteworthy example of that too scarce form, a story whose science is of the past. The science is psychological optics — in its way as dangerous to the experimenter as nuclear fission. This newest episode in the life of the curious Mr. Tarrant is further distinguished by the fact that his amiable (and in this case unusually helpful) Watson, Jeremiah Phelan, who has for so long permitted another writer to chronicle the results of the Tarrant curiosity, at last ventures into print under his own by-line. (If only the literary medico of Baker Street had done the same.)

The Episode of the Perilous Talisman

by JEREMIAH PHELAN

CHARACTERS OF THE EPISODE

Jeremiah Phelan

Dr. Joseph Hauerschultz

Henry Dwyer Howmore

Lilith Mordan Howmore

Trevis Tarrant

Dr. Brihido Cabay

the narrator

an archaeologist

a politician

his wife

interested in relics

his butler-valet

THE EPISODE that I relate here happened after Tarrant's return to America. For you will remember that, following the singular series of events recounted under the title of *The Episode of the Final Bargain*, Tarrant went away upon his extraordinary quest, that remarkable pilgrimage imposed upon him by the mysterious Monsieur Hor as the price of the latter's assistance

to us at a rather dreadful moment. Since that time I have never seen Monsieur Hor again; but I am unlikely to forget him, with his *healthy* grey complexion and the utterly graceful precision of his corpulent body when executing either the simplest or the most complex movements. Indeed I encountered him only three times, on each occasion briefly — during the unexpectedly dangerous matter of the City of Evil, and again at that restaurant in the Village where the *borscht* was so good and the killing so particularly unpleasant; finally, of course (and I still think the thing was somehow arranged by him), when he turned up opportunely at a moment of such critical impasse that he was able to exact from Tarrant any return desired. He exacted Tarrant's seven-year search.

Search for what? I don't know; in the baffling circumstances it seemed to me that what Tarrant was enjoined to find, was *himself*. There was certainly talk, and even a demonstration, of "his" practical non-existence. And first, naturally, he was told to discover those who could, and would, tell him how to proceed. On this project he agreed — he hadn't much choice — to devote seven years of his life and effort. He paid seven times the annual rental of his apartment in advance and offered the same, though in this case unacceptable, terms to his Japanese valet and friend. And he departed.

I have no knowledge as to where he went. Whenever I have tried to inquire, he either adopts a good-natured silence or else so easily deflects the topic that, before you know it, you are talking about something altogether different. Part of that time, however, I'm pretty sure he spent in or near Egypt, though not in conversation with the ordinary modern Egyptian. For his knowledge of ancient Egypt, extraordinary enough previously, now manifests a far deeper and more realistic intimacy. When such subjects come up, as occasionally they do, he gives the very strange impression of knowing of his own experience, not speculating about, a type of wisdom lost long ago and entirely incongruous with any contemporary outlook I have met.

But wherever he went and in whatever peculiar activities he took part, at the end of the agreed period he did come back. He re-opened his original apartment, searched unavailingly for our old friend, Katoh, his previous butler-valet, and in most unusual circumstances obtained instead a Filipino who in many respects turned out to be an astonishing replica of his former

servant and companion. But all that is another story, to be found elsewhere. The point is that Tarrant is back now and that I have secured his permission to publish the curious matter concerning the Howmores and their unpropitious Talisman. In fact he urged me to do so. "It might produce a salutary effect in certain quarters," he remarked.

For although Tarrant was very greatly changed when he returned to the United States, the alteration was a profound and fundamental one and neither his friends nor his acquaintances noticed much change on the surface. In such matters as dress and deportment there was no difference at all. And he continued to involve himself in a similar sort of problematical mysteries whenever they offered. He once told me they were a relaxation from his "more serious work."

His relaxations seemed serious enough to me. Sometimes they were brought to him, sometimes he smelled them out for himself, but always they were bizarre or had an unforgettable, haunting quality about them, and occasionally they were damned gruesome affairs. I by no means participated in all of them, for I have a wife and a home of my own in the country, whereas Tarrant remains a New Yorker; but for some odd reason he is fond of my sister, Mary, and he visits Valerie and me, though not often enough, so I usually hear of most of his adventures of this kind in the end. As to the affair of the Talisman, however, I was right in it from beginning to conclusion, since I was spending a week in the city at the time, while Valerie and Mary were off on some silly expedition of theirs.

It commenced with a telephone call from the Town Club. In the lounge-like living room of his East Side apartment Tarrant picked up the receiver, for he had just sent out his man, Hido, to replenish an unexpectedly low supply of Dimitrinoes. He talked for a few moments, evidently making an appointment for the evening, then put the instrument back on its cradle.

"Howmore," he said with a touch of distaste in his voice. "That political fellow. I don't like either his looks or his manners but an old friend at the club advised him to call me. It seems he has acquired some kind of ancient Egyptian relic that puzzles him and he wants me to examine it. . . . Of course, that's rather curious in itself; a man like Howmore wouldn't know the difference between a stela and a cartouche."

"Might be interesting," I suggested, adding hopefully, "Pretty weird old boys, those Egyptians."

As usual, Tarrant skipped my coda, replying only to the opening remark. "I doubt it, this time. Why not drop in after dinner, though, Jerry? I'll get rid of him as soon as I can; after that, we'll see what other trouble we can find."

So I did, of course, and when 'Hido let me in, found them already discussing the relic that Howmore had brought with him. He was a portly, coarse-looking man, perhaps in his fifties, and very handsomely dressed; but his face reminded me forcibly of one of Aunt Doris' prize pigs. To say I didn't like him is to put it simply. But he had a frank, hail-fellow sort of manner and after a few minutes I thought that maybe I had misjudged him a trifle. You can't go just by a man's face, after all.

'Hido made off toward the little kitchen and I stood for a moment in the doorway, observing the scene. For the most part the light in the room was dim and the two men sat near together beside the big, curtained windows. Before them on a small and otherwise bare table was Howmore's relic and this was flooded with light so that it stood out brightly and became the focus of the room. Even the authentic jade Buddha, which had its own illumination on the telephone cabinet, seemed lost in comparison.

The object appeared to be a shallow box, a foot long by about eight inches wide, and at one end stood a beautifully carved little obelisk, some four inches high, that perhaps served as a handle whereby to open the lid. This ornament was of a translucent material and glowed in the light falling upon and through it, while the box itself seemed to be composed of an opaque alabaster. On the side toward me there were raised, hieroglyphic markings; it may be that these were of a different substance for, in contrast to the sides of the box, they also caught and reflected the light with the effect of a spontaneous glow. There was no appearance of age about the thing; it looked as if it had just come from an artist's hands, an artist whose craftsmanship was magnificent. In the dim chamber it sparkled with a life, very beautiful but somehow weird, of its own.

I stepped into the room and presently was shaking one of Howmore's fat hands. Then, as his relic was the center of interest, I walked over to have a look at it. In fact I was reaching out to examine the obelisk when its owner caught my arm strongly and earnestly.

"Don't touch it!" he begged me with the utmost urgency.

I jumped back in surprise, startled by the excitement in his tone.

Tarrant smiled. "The point is, you mustn't open it, Jerry. And if you took it by the obelisk, you very probably would open it. Anyhow, as you can see, this box is no curio dealer's stuff but a very valuable find indeed. It oughtn't to be handled more than is necessary by any of us. Just suppose it dropped and broke."

I said, "The McCoy, eh?" I was still surprised, for Tarrant's earlier remarks about his guest had prepared me for a more perfunctory attitude.

He answered, however, in a most serious voice. "You can see it's literally a priceless piece of work and, even if I hadn't Howmore's assurances, I myself can vouch for its authenticity. Those hieroglyphs are early work, delicate and perfect, and they bear more than one indication that dates them not later than the Fourth Dynasty of the Old Kingdom. No one but an Egyptologist of great authority could have faked the relic, and such men don't turn out fakes. So it's genuine; and even the external preservation is perfect. This find in itself may easily be more valuable than the entire contents of any museum in the world."

I had not expected so solemn an expression nor so impressive a statement. For the first time I realized that Tarrant was quite in earnest and that we had before us a really extraordinary object. Howmore grunted and resumed his seat but said nothing more, so Tarrant motioned me to a chair and added, "Here is all that I know about it at present:

"This was discovered by one of Mr. Howmore's friends, a Dr. Hauer-schultz, of whom you may not have heard but I have. He was an archaeologist, not especially an expert in Egyptology, but a competent man. He found this in the Great Pyramid, which in itself is unique; to the best of my knowledge no other object, with the exception of an open and irremovable sarcophagus, has ever been found in that building. According to Mr. Howmore he found it in that portion of the Pyramid which originally was called the Well of Life. Simply by chance. As he was ascending the shaft — by means of a rope ladder, actually — he pressed against one of the stones in the wall, and the stone turned. Behind it was a wooden box, much deteriorated with age, which later turned out to contain the box we have here. Dr. Hauer-schultz with difficulty took the container with him and with even greater difficulty smuggled it out of the country. Thus he could not report his discovery for the time being but it became, quite reasonably, his most precious possession, and he was accustomed to call it the

Hauerschultz Talisman. Upon his recent death he left it to Mr. Howmore. You, sir," said Tarrant, turning to the latter, "must have been his closest friend. Dr. Hauerschultz was a comparatively young man, he was still in his thirties; what caused his death?"

Howmore motioned toward the box. "That box," he asserted.

"Ah," said Tarrant softly. "I see. He opened it?"

"There are two lids," the other declared. "I've been told, I haven't investigated. The outer one is hinged somehow at the end where the obelisk is and you simply use that to lift it back. I don't know how the inner lid opens. There is a mechanism of some sort inside, for a bell-like note is struck when the outer lid is raised and two such notes for the inner lid. Then apparently they close by themselves, weighted probably; when that happens, the note sounds three times. No one saw Joseph die but one of his servants heard those notes sound; once, then twice, then three times. They must have a peculiar effect, for the servant stood frightened for a minute or more before finally going into the room. The box lay closed upon a tabouret and Joseph was dead on the floor beside it. His face, according to the servant, was contorted with fear. They called it heart failure; there wasn't any inquest. And the servant has told no one but me, doesn't like to talk about it."

Tarrant remarked, "Hm. So that's why you brought it to me? You can't read the inscription yourself, perhaps?"

"That's not the only reason. The executor of Hauerschultz' estate took the box to a safe deposit vault temporarily. When he was obtaining it to give it to me, he went through some papers and so on which he had there and left the box during this time on a table behind him. One of the safe deposit guards must have opened it, for the executor was suddenly startled by the sound of a note, so startled that for some instants he says he sat stiff and motionless. Then came the two notes—the guard dropped down behind him. Heart failure again, of course; the executor hardly thought he could raise an alarm on such meagre grounds, and said nothing. But *he* never looked in the box—told me he didn't like the sort of noise it made. . . . Well, there you are, eh? Can you tell me anything about it?"

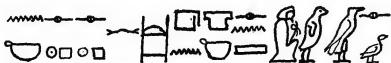
Tarrant was leaning forward, scrutinizing the hieroglyphic inscription. "I can read it for you," he admitted. "By the way, there was nothing, you told me, on the outer box, the one that held this one, except the cartouche of the Master Priest of Men-nefer?"

Howmore had relapsed to grunts which we took for acquiescence.

But I asked, "Chief Priest? What has he to do with it? I thought this was found in the Pyramid. That was just a big, inflated tomb, wasn't it?"

Tarrant seemed to have caught the habit, for he grunted contemptuously. "Nonsense, Jerry. It was a place of initiation, of learning the secret wisdom possessed by the highest faculty of the land. There was plenty of that. What you would call science, I suppose, although the scientists have a long way to go now to catch up with it. The head of the whole hierarchy, probably the most learned man of that learned time, was called the Master of the House of the Hidden Places, or sometimes simply the Master of the Secret. The House of the Hidden Places was itself the Pyramid, of course. It was his cartouche, or seal, that alone was found on the outer box, as I understand it."

"That's right," Howmore agreed, and I leaned forward, like Tarrant, to inspect the line of luminous hieroglyphs that marched around the sides of the second, alabaster box. Their apparent illumination made them clearly visible:



“They’re not very difficult,” Tarrant remarked. “Just a simple statement. . . . Of course you understand that the proper pronunciation of the words has long since been lost and, because these symbols stand merely for the consonants, the verbal skeleton as it were, no one can make more than a bad guess, academically, as to how they sounded originally. Here, I’ll write the letters out just as they stand and I’ll put under them one of the more or less accepted transliterations. It won’t be anything like the proper words themselves, though.”

He took a small pad from the telephone cabinet, and wrote:

s-w sns-k hn pn n-sp spi-n-k——

sawe senesh-ek hen pen en-sep espy-en-ek.

"Huh," said Howmore. "Well, so what? What does it mean?"

"Oh, that's simple enough. It just says in so many words: 'Beware lest you open this box. You will never survive.'"

"Ugh. That's exactly what happened." For an instant it seemed to me that Howmore's surprise held an element of pleasure.

"So you tell me," Tarrant agreed. "But what is even more interesting to me is the purpose of that box."

"The purpose of it?" I must have sounded as if my mouth were hanging open, for he smiled. "The purpose was to kill people."

"Hardly, Jerry. I meant the original purpose. That box was once put where it was found, for a reason; but I don't think the reason was connected with Dr. Hauerschultz. Or with his executor. Do you?"

"Well. . . . No, I suppose not."

"Let us see if we can make a guess. It was behind a movable stone in a passage of the Pyramid that almost certainly had to do with Initiation. The candidate, when he —"

"Hey! Just a minute, Trevis. Let's get this straight. What initiation are you talking about? And this candidate — candidate for what?"

"Candidate for Initiation," he grinned. Then he continued perfectly soberly: "In my opinion that's what the Pyramid was used for at the period indicated by the box. Perhaps 'initiation' isn't the best possible term; it derives from Greek times when such a process had degenerated into mere formalities with little or no remaining interior reality. But in Egypt there were genuine Schools — the sort of thing that would go nowadays under the somewhat misleading title of 'occult' schools — and the Great School, the one that made use of the Pyramid, was a very serious undertaking indeed. Its specialty was objective — that is, real — knowledge of the real universe; and one of the possibilities it offered to its postulants was an opportunity, under careful instruction, so to develop their natural but unsuspected organic functions as to be able to transform themselves from the customary subhumanity into fully human individuals. Under any conditions, even the most favorable, and at any given period, only a very few persons can attain to such a goal successfully; the purpose of the tests employed by the Great School was simply to furnish objective evidence, beyond any question of personal opinion, concerning the degree of development in fact reached by the particular candidate. That kind of ordeal is not a game, nor is there any element of competition in it. A candidate for initiation was only a later Greek-type counterfeit; the real candidacy is for truly human status as a completely developed individual. . . .

"Well, that's as clear as I wish to make it, here. Let's get back to the box. The candidate, when he had managed to reach that place in the Pyramid's Well of Life, would know of the stone, move it and obtain the box. He would then have to remove this one, *our* box, from the larger container and read —"

"How could he read it?" I interrupted, a bit pleased with myself. "The place was pitch-black, wasn't it?"

"The whole structure may not always have been so dark as it is today. However, I rather think that that part of it was. Still, the candidate may have been able to see in the dark somewhat better than you or I can. Let's investigate."

Tarrant reached out to the wall beside him, clicked a switch and the room was plunged into night. In a moment we saw the obelisk and the hieroglyphs gleaming through the obscurity. As our eyes became dark-adapted, they stood out clearly enough.

I cried out in astonishment. "There's a light in that thing!"

"Pretty long time, four or five thousand years," Tarrant commented dryly, "for a light to burn. We shall not need to postulate wonders. I imagine the obelisk and the carvings are made of substances that become luminous under the influence of light and remain that way for some time after the external source is withdrawn." He switched on the illumination in the room again.

"So he could read it all right," he went on. "Somehow he managed to extract this box and then he read the inscription."

"And he was supposed to open it?"

"And he was meant to open it."

"Oh, I see," I said, for I thought I did. "A test of courage."

"I think not," replied Tarrant. "At that point the candidate would long since have passed all such tests successfully. Of course the tests for courage were no joke, one could only survive them if he actually possessed that quality; in such a case, however, success was automatic. But I suspect that this one was a more hazardous trial. I don't suppose that very many of the candidates reached the top of the Well of Life after opening this receptacle. Of course they were given a *very* small advantage; that's what confirms my opinion of this to me."

"Well, they are warned not to open it. But you say they were meant to."

"Yes. . . Yes. Now remember, Jerry, and you, too, Mr. Howmore, that we are dealing with the best minds of an ancient civilization, really ancient and really civilized. Not the Greek chatterbox performance that came later and merely reduced wisdom to wisecracking. Also remember not only that the inscription is in hieroglyphic but that hieroglyphic is a technical language, among other things. In the circumstances which we are assuming the word, 'you' — in hieroglyphic — had a meaning far different from its colloquial use nowadays. Still literal, but also technical. It did not mean you, the personality, Jones or Smith or Tarrant or Howmore; it meant you, the ultimate experiencer, the final subjective entity whose association with an organic body presents the foundation for all *human* possibility. Moreover, in the case of any candidate admitted to the Well of Life, there was possessed an actual physical entity related to this subjective characteristic, as contrasted to the vague emptiness today designated by the word, 'I'. When he read the inscription containing the hieroglyphic word, 'you,' the candidate knew just what it meant; and it is instructive to reflect upon the magnificent competence of that language for, although to the candidate many thousands of years ago it conveyed a technically literal meaning, to the uninstructed now, who certainly are not candidates for anything except personal destruction, it bears a different significance, equally literal, however. . . . There are certain rather foolish contemporaries of ours," Tarrant regretted, "and some of them hold noteworthy degrees, to whom such a phenomenon puts too great a strain upon the imagination."

"I must be one of them," I muttered, although I hold no noteworthy degrees. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Perhaps it doesn't matter," he replied. "You do not propose to open the box, do you, Jerry?"

"Not me! You're damn right I don't!"

"I don't know," Howmore put in. "I think the thing was a bluff that was meant to be called. Makes me feel like a fool to be humbugged that way. I'd put down a big bet that that box is just an empty box with a bell in it."

Tarrant said, "The stakes *are* high. Well, go ahead." He motioned toward the Talisman.

But Howmore showed no sign of accepting the offer. He said, "No. I'd

be a fool to do it, after what's happened. But it makes me feel like one not to do it, too. It's exasperating. Now what do you *really* think about it?"

"Just what I've told you, Mr. Howmore. It is the most extraordinary and well-preserved object from ancient Egypt that I have ever seen. It is concrete evidence of their craftsmanship, their knowledge, their wisdom. It is in operating condition. And it is very dangerous."

"You — believe that?"

"I do. I wish you would leave it with me for a few days." He looked anxiously at his guest. "I'm interested in the single determinative after the 'saw'; during the Middle Kingdom there were three. I'll guarantee its safety and its return to you without harm. But I should like very much to study it some more."

"I don't know. You take it seriously, do you? You will not open it, I suppose?"

"I shall not open it," Tarrant assured him.

"All right, then," said Howmore. "I don't want to find you on the floor, too. But keep it a day or so, if you wish."

Tarrant whistled the two notes by which he summoned his man, 'Hido. "Sit down, doctor," he invited, thus indicating a social truce, for in fact Brihido Cabay *was* Dr. Cabay in his own country.

"I hear what happen," he remarked calmly, selecting one of the Dimitrinoes for which he had foraged earlier in the day. "This box, it is really magh-ic?"

"It would have been called magical after its true purpose had been forgotten. And it would live up to its name, too. Yes, it's a dangerous toy for the uninstructed."

"Some gas inside? Some quick bacterium? Very quick?"

"Something rather more efficacious, I should think," Tarrant replied. "What sort of gases or bacteria do you suppose could last as long as this?"

'Hido shrugged. "Not know," he admitted. "But you say iss zerious matter. Must be something in box."

"Of course there's something in it. Something very dangerous for the ordinary person. But not what you're thinking."

"Magh-ic iss," the Filipino asserted. "But as to me, I not know much for magh-ic. Monsieur Hor —"

"The question we have to do with here," Tarrant told him, "is perhaps not as interesting but may be even more important. I didn't call you in to inquire about Curses from the Tomb. This didn't come from a tomb, in any case."

"Even more important? What this question, then?"

Tarrant said slowly, "Don't dismiss it too casually. It strikes me as very curious indeed. . . . Why did Howmore bring that box here at all?"

"Why, for goodness' sake!" I could answer that one. "He brought it here because it had killed two people, one of them his best friend. Naturally he'd want to find out anything he could about it."

Tarrant's voice was soft and reflective again. "What makes you think the box has killed two people, Jerry?"

"Why, he said so, didn't he?"

"He said so. Oh, yes. But you don't know that's true. . . . Neither do I."

"You think not zo?" Hido's voice was almost plaintive. "Box not dangerous after all?"

Tarrant answered positively, "*I* know it's dangerous. But I don't believe Howmore knows it. Just think what he told us. That two men have died. We don't even know that, but let us suppose so. They were said to have died of heart failure. After what I've seen here, it may be so or it may not be so; but I think Howmore believes it is so. So do I, as a matter of fact. But I'll stake my word he believes the heart failure was due to ordinary organic causes without reference to the box. Such being the case, why did he bring the thing here, to a stranger, believing it to be innocuous, although in truth it is far from that? . . . It's a nice little puzzle in personality patterns, don't you agree? Maybe it's more than that, too."

Hido acknowledged, "See what you mean. Fella bring box here with story that it is dangerous. Just same, he not know this. Then why story?" He paused, and went on after a moment. "Can only see this: he want someone else to back up story about dangerous box, which he wish say but not believe himself. Why such wish, eh? Not look good. Who this fella, anyhow?"

It was getting pretty complicated for me but at least I knew who Howmore was. He was a politician, the new-format kind, and back-room deals were certainly no mystery to him. Nor street-corner ones, either; he would

bargain with anyone or any gang that could hand over a few thousand votes and was not above a dicker with gunmen on the side. Unsavory, the word used to be, I think. And a good while ago he had married Lilith Mordan, greatly to everyone's astonishment. Of course you know about her: very wealthy, very high-toned and fastidious, and she still has the reputation of being not only one of the best-dressed but one of the most beautiful women in the world. It was an inexplicable match. But anyhow with her money and the turn of the political tide Howmore had risen rapidly in the past ten years and was now considered a powerful person. I had met his wife once or twice, for she was still a friend of Aunt Doris', although the Aunt would not permit Howmore in her house. All this I related as briefly as possible to my companions. "Unpleasant," I finished, "but what has it got to do with that Talisman?"

"Have rich wife. Mebbe wish money for self," contributed 'Hido.

"Wait a minute," Tarrant considered. "If the man has reached the position you say he has, he must have money of his own."

"Graft come quick," said 'Hido darkly. "Go quick, too, sometimes. Then come little bit blackmail or some other emergency. Wife tired giving up money. Get rid wife."

"Skipping along pretty fast, aren't you, doctor? We should scarcely be justified in taking any action on the basis of a wild guess like that. . . . Of course I don't like the set-up any better than you do."

"Forget wife," the Filipino conceded. "Here iss man with deadly box. He going to use it on someone else mebbe."

"There are two good reasons against that, doctor. The first is that he wouldn't be displaying it if he proposed to use it. The second reason is that he doesn't even believe it's dangerous. That's what he wants *us* to believe."

"How then?"

"Well, one can't help thinking he might have other plans, the result of which he intends to blame on the box. There's a subtle little giveaway in his letting me keep it. I told him I wanted it because I was interested in there being only a single determinative after the word, 'sawe.' But since I have already observed that fact, the box itself cannot tell me any more about it; in other words my reason for retaining it was a false one. Nevertheless, he let me bluff him with a false reason. Would he do that unless there were something dubious about his own connection with the matter, something further

he didn't want to get involved in discussing? His behavior suggests an anxiety to appear more than naturally unconcerned about his possession of this very remarkable instrument. And he certainly wasn't disappointed when he found that I took the Talisman seriously."

It didn't seem to me that, in that case, we could do much about it. I said so.

"Not see how," 'Hido agreed gloomily.

Tarrant said, "We can for the moment, anyhow. If he wants a scapegoat, he needs it in his hands. . . . That was my real reason for keeping the Talisman."

It was several days before we had anything more definite to go on. But when we got it, it was definite enough. And I got it.

Tarrant had been worried, and busy. He had dispatched 'Hido on mysterious errands; he had collected quite a bulky dossier on Howmore, a considerable achievement in view of the shortness of the time. "The man's a crook all right," he muttered, "but his crimes, such as they are, are public, not private. So far as I can find."

He got to his feet and paced the floor, a frown on his face. "Damn it all, we must do something. He's bothering me for his Talisman already. I can't keep it indefinitely and I don't dare return it yet. It sounds ridiculous but I've a hunch about this. I'm *sure* he's up to something. That business of coming here with the box, and then letting me keep it, just doesn't make sense otherwise."

He paced some more. "Look here, Jerry, in the morning I want you to go and see him. He must have an office in his home somewhere. Get in there, see him and talk to him."

"Eh?" I was surprised. "About what?"

"About anything. Just talk to him. Keep your eyes open and see if you can uncover anything. Oh, tell him you came to warn him that the Talisman really *is* dangerous. To impress it on him, so he would take every precaution. That's good enough for a starter. Then keep going as long as you can."

"Why don't you go?" I asked. It seemed like a pretty vague assignment to me.

'Hido grinned from the doorway. "Better Misster Jerry go. Howmore man mebbe not so suspicious as if Misster Tarrant come see him."

Well, I got that soon enough. I said sharply, "Oh, yeah? You wait and see."

And it wasn't more than ten-thirty the next morning when I snapped back to Tarrant's apartment. Hido answered the door and grinned again. "You catch misster political fella?" he asked.

I said, "Certainly." I'd show them this time, both of them. Perhaps I'd had a bit of luck but just the same I was feeling pretty darned sharp. With all the luck in the world you still have to recognize what's in front of you. Practically the first time I'd ever gotten the goods on an actual criminal. I walked in and sat down.

Tarrant glanced up from the morning paper. "Well? You look extremely pleased with yourself, Jerry."

"Why not? I've got the goods on him. And proof. Documentary proof."

A startled expression came over Tarrant's face. "Just what did you do up there?" he demanded.

"Went in and talked to him. And burglarized his desk."

"You — burglarized — his desk?"

"Of course. You can't do these things with kid gloves. He got up and went out for a minute or so —"

"I rather hoped, Jerry, that he'd think you harmless enough to do something like that. Think you rather a fool, with your warnings about the box —"

"It's the last time," I cut in, "that he'll think so."

"I should not have supposed that he'd keep anything very incriminating on his desk top," Tarrant said doubtfully. Still, there was every sign of interest in his face. "What *did* you get?"

"Not from the top of his desk. From the right-hand top drawer."

"But what was it?"

It was the moment I had been waiting for. I said calmly, "His new driver's license application."

"What?" Tarrant's expression fell like a stone dropped over a cliff. The picture of anticlimax.

Now I was really enjoying it. "Not so fast with the groans, my good friend," I adjured him. "You will recall that those applications are not acceptable until next week; the date on this one is the fourteenth. . . . With that in mind, just have a glance at it."

He looked at me questioningly, then considered the document. It couldn't have been more than a few seconds before he got it.

"My God!" he cried. He sprang to his feet. "My God, we have almost no time at all!"

'Hido exclaimed, "What thiss?" And I was glad to note that he glanced at me with a brand-new respect. Tarrant handed him the paper.

As of six days later Howmore had described himself as a "widower".

"He'll come here right enough," Tarrant was repeating. "When I tell him I'm going to open the box. He has got to prevent that at all costs."

"But — what then?"

"Then I *shall* open it."

"But thiss dangherous," 'Hido insisted.

"I believe it is. Very."

"You take chance? So prove box cannot kill? Then Howmore man cannot use for scrapegoat?"

"Yes," said Tarrant absently. "Yes, that of course. But I'll have to do more than that. That would only delay him a little. No more."

"What in box pliss?" The Filipino's voice was full of an unshakable faith in Tarrant, full of insatiable curiosity, also.

"Eh? Why, doctor, to tell you the truth I don't think there is anything in it now. But there will be."

"You put something in?"

"No, of course not. The box is fully competent to operate as it is. I shall put nothing in it, nothing material, at any rate."

I thought it my turn to ask a question. "Shall we give him back his application?"

"Certainly not. So that he can think up some explanation of absent-mindedness or other nonsense? And manipulate his political power to have us charged with burglary plus libel? Oh, no. Mr. Howmore," said Tarrant grimly, "won't need that application. He won't be a widower, you see."

Howmore came.

He entered blustering and shouting. He wouldn't permit this and he wouldn't permit that. Especially he wouldn't permit any tampering with his relic, *his* Talisman. Tarrant let him rant for a time.

Then he said quietly, "Mr. Howmore, there is no occasion for your excitement. I recognize that this ancient object belongs to you and I shall not operate it without your permission. At the same time I owe it to you to tell you the alternative. The alternative is that I shall inform the police as to its deadly potentialities and" — he raised his hand as the other smiled involuntarily — "more than the police. I shall also inform the press. Oh, I won't tell them anything you have given me in confidence, although I must remind you that you came here without invitation and that I am really under no obligation to you of any kind. However, there is very little about the Talisman which the press won't dig out, once I have given them the lead. Now don't jump to conclusions; it might not be either as pleasant or as profitable to you as you would wish. There are aspects of this whole situation that are — well, tricky and double-edged."

Howmore seemed a little confused. He demanded, "Like what?"

"Like a death in the family," said Tarrant slowly.

The politician almost did jump; at least it seemed to me that he gave a perceptible start. Then he appeared to be thinking rapidly. "All right, Mr. Tarrant, you go ahead and open it. I've warned you more than once now."

"I repeat," my friend answered, "that I am under no obligation whatsoever to you. I do not need *you* to tell me of the objective dangers inherent in an instrument deriving from a wisdom you will never even remotely comprehend. . . . If you gentlemen will kindly take seats at the other end of the room, I shall open the box."

We did so after a further bit of fuss and Tarrant again placed the Talisman on a bare table top. It was not, this time, in the direct beams of a light but almost at once the obelisk and the hieroglyphs commenced to glow with their peculiar luminosity. The scene was a quiet one and, except for Hido's sibilant intake of breath, soundless at first. Then the low rumble of traffic made a scarcely audible background. Perhaps I wasn't any too clear in my thoughts but I was impressed nonetheless; the pleasant room, a scene of so many friendly conferences, the light from Buddha's lamp falling obliquely across the relic, Tarrant sitting motionless and evidently steeling himself as if for a critical ordeal. The tension built itself up.

Then he leaned calmly forward, took hold of the obelisk and tilted it back.

At once a low but penetrating note sounded. It's difficult to describe that sound: people go to the Opera and learn a lot of silly themes and then they

proclaim that music has meaning because they have learned an artificial code. It wasn't like that at all; I believe that any human being, yellow, black, white, red or brown, would have received essentially the same impression from it, and I found later that 'Hido and Tarrant and I did, anyhow. It was just as if the word, "Pray," had been pronounced deeply.

With his other hand Tarrant drew back the inner lid. The double notes accompanied his action, deeper, more resonant — "Repent."

Whether it was these sounds or what it may have been, I don't know; but I forgot everything else and became intent upon a single object, Tarrant. He looked full and directly into the box and, as he looked, his face turned greyish in the light and the edges of his lips white. Almost inaudibly he gasped, as one gasps who is prepared for a terrific blow — and then gets it.

He held his position, so he told us later, while he counted to ten. Then he released the two lids, which fell smoothly back into place. There came the triple note; and it amazed me. Jubilant, singing, triumphant; as if an ultimate vengeance had been taken or an ultimate anguish redeemed. . . . "It is done." . . .

A minute or more passed in silence. Tarrant lay back in his chair, relaxed, weary, fighting nausea with visual images. Finally he spoke, weakly. "'Hido — brandy."

Before he could straighten, it was there, his man bending anxiously over him. Tarrant took the glass, tried a smile, and gulped. The color came back to his face and in a moment more he stood up.

"Mr. Howmore," he said, "there is your Talisman. You may put it in the container in which you brought it and you may take it with you. As you see, it does not always kill. It is not altogether safe to look into it but what it contains is the most valuable secret I have ever learned. Of inestimable value."

Howmore stammered, "There, there is something valuable in there? Valuable?"

"Worth more than any sum of money I have ever known," Tarrant answered him sincerely. . . . "And now I must beg you to excuse me. I am going to bed."

It was late the next morning when Tarrant got up. I know; I stayed the night, for I was worried about him. However, he looked remarkably chipper

at a late breakfast. And afterwards he called in 'Hido with the salutation of "doctor."

"Doctor," he said, "you are a genuine friend. You haven't asked."

'Hido admitted, "No. Look zerious. Not ask." But his eyes were glittering and the expression on his face as importunate as any words.

Tarrant smiled. "It is magic," he told us, "or rather what has often been called magic when wisdom has declined into mere knowledge. That box contains one of the most tremendous accomplishments in psychological optics that, I think, has ever been achieved. The old Egyptian name for what it contains, is *Ankh-en-Maat*, which is either the Living Truth or the Mirror of Truth. Perhaps both."

"Was mirror!" 'Hido's voice held excitement. "Now I see! Nothing in box till you open. Then is reflection. What you mean, psychological?"

"Oh, I know that the term, psychological, is misused nowadays in all kinds of fanciful and metaphorical ways," Tarrant confessed. "There is nothing in those senses 'psychological' about the mirror. It reflects the essential personality attributes of the face that gazes into it, not because the person is hypnotized by a light-beam or any such nonsense; what it reflects is accurate because it is designed *optically* to produce a selective reflection of those facial lines, and only those lines, which the distortion called 'personality' creates."

"Hey?" cried 'Hido. "How do thiss?"

"Well, there are two factors involved. Probably you have never tried it deliberately but it may have happened to you by chance; have you ever caught a glimpse of yourself or your face unexpectedly in an ordinary mirror? When the last thing in your mind was any intention of looking at yourself? If so, you saw a stranger and were vividly surprised; if you got a clear enough look, you may have been really shocked. Inadvertently for a few instants you were looking at yourself impartially and objectively and when you look in that way, what you see is so different from your usual subjective image of yourself that it creates a deep impression. Then almost at once the old subjective image reasserts itself and the moment passes. Of course the same thing can be done with audition, as any non-professional knows who has heard his own voice played back on a wire-recording or phonograph record. That is the basis of the present phenomenon. That is the 'psychology' in it.

"Now we come to the optics. Perfectly natural but very advanced, too advanced to be covered in a few words. So I'll just tell you the principle. In a mirror the permissible deviation from smoothness of the reflecting surface is of the order of one-eighth the wave-length of the light involved, if total reflection is to be obtained; conversely, a greater degree of roughness diffuses the light-rays striking at such a point, instead of reflecting them. Since the Mirror of Truth is surrounded inside by a band of the same luminous material composing the outside hieroglyphs, the relevant wave-length is easily calculated and a differentially reflecting surface obtainable for that particular wave-length. In other words the surface is so constructed that at certain points it reflects and at others it diffuses parts of the image of a human face looking into it. Such a differentially reflecting surface could not be designed today, for the reason that gross physiology has not gone far enough to be able to determine which lines are common to all human faces as contrasted with those others that are idiosyncratic with any given person. But it could be done once. Howmore took the evidence of that with him last night, when he left.

"The effect of such differential reflection is naturally far more shocking than a chancy or unwitting glance into an ordinary mirror could produce. Of course there is more involved in the optical technique than I have explained but by a combination of these psychological and optical principles the Mirror of Truth gives the beholder a visual demonstration of his own weaknesses and vices by an actual picture of them in his own face. Ordinarily those vicious lines are weakened, softened, disguised, not only by the person's deceitful subjective image of himself and his appearance but by the many other lines also present in his face. But this mirror reflects solely those lineaments the man himself has fashioned by his own false living. It strips away the disguise, leaving only the attributes that are *his own*. It is a severe test. That's why it was part of the ancient Trial."

He paused. "I was wrong about the advantage I supposed the candidate to have had," he went on slowly. "I thought the darkness of the Well of Life might have palliated the image for him. But with the interior illumination of the box and the additional light in this room interfering with it, it was I who escaped the more easily."

"Ho, what if there are no such lines?"

"Somewhat unlikely," said Tarrant dryly. "Only the most strict and un-

compromising self-discipline, carried out over years, could result in a face without them. Of course it is *possible*. In that case the Mirror is pure; it reflects nothing. At one time only a Master of the Pure Mirror was eligible as a Master of the Secret."

Now 'Hido's voice was awe-struck. "How you dare this thing? Your purpose protect you?"

"No. Nothing will protect you; not even the saving of another life. Like all *real* 'magic' the trial is purely, simply, and finally objective. . . . Well, I have been in some strange places during the past few years; I have been through a somewhat similar experience. That is why I dared." He grimaced. "It was a horrible sight, though; shaking and terrible."

"But why?" I demanded. "How could this help anyone but yourself?"

"See if the afternoon paper is here, Jerry," he answered. And when I had found the early edition in the vestibule, he folded back the obituary page and handed it to me.

There it was — Death of Henry Dwyer Howmore. Prominent in Politics. Heart Failure the Cause.

"He looked last night," explained my friend. "Naturally. Afraid I might get ahead of him. And when he looked, he was looking avidly for a money-valuable secret."

"You took another chance. It might not have worked."

"With such a man?" Tarrant's smile was hard. "Without preparation? There was no chance. I meant it when I said he would never be a widower."



In our next issue (*due on the stands in mid-February*) we bring you:

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THE EDITORS



